NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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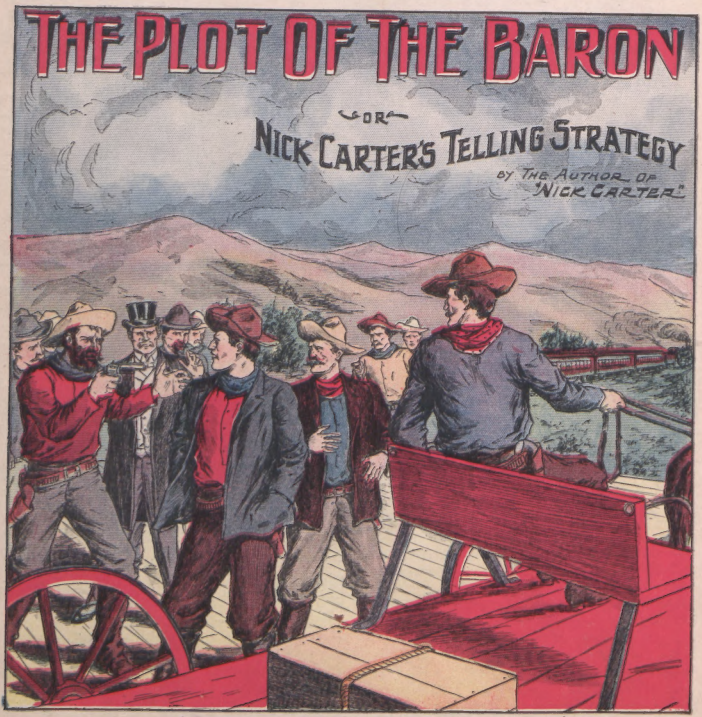
THE PLOT OF THE BARON

OR

NICK CARTER'S TELLING STRATEGY

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER."



Nick wheeled about without removing his hands from his coat-pockets, but he discovered that the man who had spoken to him already had him covered.

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OR,

NICK CARTER'S TELLING STRATEGY.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

NICK CARTER'S UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

It was Sunday afternoon in the beginning of the month of September.

Nick Carter was practically alone in the house when the bell rang. Chick was out of the city at work on a case to which the detective had assigned him. Patsy had accepted an invitation to pass the Sunday in the country, and Ten-Ichi was spending the day with some old friends from Japan who were stopping temporarily at the Waldorf; and even Joseph had begged an afternoon "off" in order to take a last look at Coney Island before the season should be closed for the year.

Among the servants, only the housekeeper, Jannette, was at home, and she was pursuing her usual custom of spending Sunday afternoon in her room—so Nick went to the door in person.

When he opened it, he uttered an exclamation of surprise; then he started forward and extended his hand cordially toward the man who stood smiling upon the door-step.

"Trevelyan!" he exclaimed. "Well, well, well, Penryn, I *am* glad to see you. Where in the world did you drop from so unexpectedly?"

"I arrived in Boston yesterday afternoon by one of the old Cunarders," replied Trevelyan, entering the house and depositing his Gladstone bag on the floor, after which he gripped the detective's hand again and shook it heartily. "I slept in a hotel there last night, and came on here by train to-day. I have just come from the station."

"Well, I certainly am glad to see you, Treve, old fellow!" said Nick again. "You are going to make me quite a visit now, aren't you?"

"That depends, Nick," laughed the Scotland Yard detective.

"All right. Come right along up-stairs while I show you to your room. You shall have ample time to wash up and all that before I ask you any questions."

He had seized the grip in the meantime and was already leading the way up the stairs, and as they passed the open door of the room which Nick called his study, he said:

"You will find me in there when you are through, Treve." Then he conducted his friend to another room and left him.

Twenty minutes later the Scotland Yard detective entered the study with an unlighted pipe between his teeth, having washed up and made some few trifling changes in his clothing.

"I didn't light this pipe, Nick," he said, laughing, "because I didn't know whether the smell of a pipe would be agreeable to the other members of the household; but——"

"Nonsense! This is Liberty Hall. Light up. Smoke anywhere you please in this house. Sit over there by the window in that easy chair. Put your feet on the foot-rest and make yourself just as much at home as if the place was your own. That's right. Now, tell me what happy breeze it was that blew you over here."

"I'm a little bit afraid that it couldn't be called a happy breeze at all, Nick," was the sober reply.

"I hope you are not on somebody's trail, Trevelyan, and that I have got to lose you again the moment you appear," said Nick. "I had begun to hope that you were here for the sole purpose of making me a visit."

"Well, I am; and again I am not. I think I will leave that largely to your own judgment."

"Eh? What are you driving at, old chap?"

"Before I answer any questions, Nick, let me ask you about young Maxim and his bride, who was the Princess Wanda. Are they well?"

The detective laughed joyously.

"Well and happy," he replied. "Talk about cooing doves—they aren't in it with that pair. Just at present they are sojourning in that vague place which Americans call 'Out West'; old Porter Maxim owns an enormous ranch to which Maxwell and his wife and the little one have gone."

"Then it is fair to presume that they are at least safe for the present," said Trevelyan half to himself.

"Safe? Of course they are safe. What do you mean by that remark?"

"I will tell you presently. It is just a month to-day, isn't it, since you and I parted with each other at Southampton? You to cross to this country in the same ship with young Maxim and his wife and child, and I to return to my duties at Scotland Yard?"

"That is a fact; just a month ago to-day."

"Nick, I wonder if you know the size of the draft that old Porter Maxim sent to me in payment for my share in that business of finding his son and rescuing the princess, his wife—or, to be more exact, for my share in helping you. Do you?"

"Yes. He told me. In fact, he asked me about it before he sent it," replied Nick, smiling.

"He sent me a draft on his London house for twenty thousand pounds—a hundred thousand dollars in your money. I would have thought myself well paid with one-twentieth of that amount."

"Oh, well. Don't forget two things: One is that old Maxim was very much pleased with your work, and was very grateful, and the other is that he could afford to pay you what he pleased, and I have no doubt that it gave him great pleasure to place you beyond want."

"I thought, when I received it, that it must be a mistake," said Trevelyan, "and I cabled him to find out about it before I presented the draft at the banking house."

"Yes. I know that also. It pleased the old man mightily—your doing that."

"Well, Nick, I want to tell you what I did when I discovered that all that money was mine."

"I hope you didn't go on a spree, Treve," said Nick, laughing. "I should be sorry to hear such a thing about you."

"Indeed, I did not. But I went to my chief at Scotland Yard, and told him the whole story from beginning to end. I had already told him much of it, of course, but I had never gone into the details of the case with him. I had never told him the particulars about how young Maxim fitted up a home for his bride in Germany, how he induced her to elope with him, and how her royal relatives descended upon the nest, stole away the princess, possibly murdered the maid and dressed her in the clothing of the princess so that the young husband would believe it was the dead body of his wife. I hadn't gone into those particulars."

"No?"

"And I hadn't explained all the details of our conquest of the old castle, either, where we rescued the princess; where we found young Maxim waiting to rescue her—and all that."

"Well? What is this all leading up to, Trevelyan?"

"To this: When I received that twenty thousand pounds, I felt that I had an added duty to perform for old Porter Maxim and his son and son's wife."

"Oh, you did, eh?"

"Yes. And my reason for going to my chief and giving him the details of the entire story about the affair* was that I wished to obtain a year's leave of absence from the yard."

"Oh! I see! To blow in your dough; is that it?"

"No; it isn't it. You should know me better than that."

"Well, I think I do. What was your reason? You are a long time in getting to it, Treve."

"When I had finished telling the story to my chief," continued Trevelyan slowly, "I said these words to him: 'I think that the acceptance of all this money has placed

*Read No. 523 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "The Man in the Doorway."

an obligation upon me which I am anxious to fulfil, chief.'

"He wanted to know what it was, and I told him that I had a sneaking idea that the trouble from that quarter wasn't over yet. I told him that I knew something about the history of old Graf Von Buhlmach, the princess' uncle, and I had been given to understand that he was a man who never let go. I told him that although we had rescued the princess and restored husband and wife to each other, I still believed that the old graf would pursue the pair relentlessly and savagely as long as he lived; and I closed by saying this: 'What I want to do now is to obtain a year's leave of absence from duty at the yard in order that I can spend that year in watching that old German baron.'"

"By Jove, Trevelyan! That was thoughtful of you. It was the right kind of gratitude, too."

"I told him," continued Trevelyan, "that if after I had kept tabs on the baron for a year and I found that he did nothing which meant injury to the princess or to her husband or child, I would return to my duty perfectly satisfied—but that I wouldn't be satisfied in any less time than that. Do you catch the point?"

"I am beginning to do so; go on."

"Well, I obtained my leave of absence. The chief agreed with me in my views of what my duty in the matter was, and so that same afternoon I started for Germany."

"For Heidelberg, for Heilbenn, and for Castle Thunder, eh?"

"Precisely."

"And it is because you did that, that you are here now?"

"You have guessed it, Nick."

"And that means that the old baron *has* gone on the war-path after his niece the princess and the man she married, eh?"

"That is just exactly what it does mean, Nick."

"Since when?"

"Well, I traveled with him from Heilbenn to Heidelberg; from Heidelberg to Berlin; from Berlin to Paris; from Paris to London; from London to Boston, and from Boston, this morning, to New York. The old baron is at this moment at your Hotel Mammoth, resting up a bit, I expect, for he is not as young as he was fifty years ago. Nick, that old devil must be past seventy if he is a day, and yet he is as energetic, as strong, as quick, and as full of fire and vim as if he were under forty."

"I don't doubt it. I am rather surprised, however, that he should undertake the thing in person."

"Oh, he isn't alone. He has a whole suite with him. Do you remember my friend in Berlin? Colonel Von Uhler?"

"Yes."

"He is with him. Now understand that I would as soon believe something dishonorable and underhanded of you, as I would of Eitel von Uhler; but all the same, because of his very probity, he is an easy mark to make a tool of, by such a man as the baron."

"I can understand that."

"Well, now listen to the rest of the personnel of the baron's suite."

"Go ahead."

"The old duffer has brought only one actual servant; that is his valet. The others, to a man, pose as members of his suite—as secretaries, clerks, messengers, and factotums of some sort—but in reality two of them are members of the German secret police, and the remaining three are French spies of the most unscrupulous sort. They are men who can play any parts from bourgeois to a Duc de la Tour; from a concierge to a prince of the blood, and there is not one of them in the whole outfit with the exception of Eitel von Uhler, who wouldn't as soon cut a throat or administer a dose of poison as to drink an absynthe drip."

"You give them rather startling characteristics."

"They are correct, all the same."

"Then do you think you have done well to leave the outfit unwatched even for the time it has required for you to look me up?"

"You needn't worry about that, Nick. They are not unwatched. I brought two of the best 'shadows' in Europe over with me. They are both on duty now."

CHAPTER II.

THE MISSION OF TREVELYAN.

"Now," said Nick, "in order that we may arrive at the facts already in your possession, in chronological order, suppose you begin at the beginning and tell me the whole story from the time you left London to return to Germany, until you walked in here this afternoon. But first before you begin, one question, Treve."

"Yes?"

"I suppose there is no doubt in your own mind whatever, that the purpose of the baron's visit is inimical to the peace and happiness of Maxwell and his wife and child?"

"None whatever."

"All right. Now, let us have your story."

"Well, as soon as I obtained my leave of absence from the chief, I set out at once for Germany. I left London that very day."

"That is like you."

"I disguised myself as a peasant, as young Maxim had done in the past, and I found no difficulty in obtaining employment on the baron's estate, near the castle. I

was fortunate, too, in getting the sort of work I most desired."

"You mean, I suppose, work which kept you in the immediate neighborhood of the castle itself?"

"Yes."

"Go on."

"That done, I made use of that secret entrance to the castle which has been forgotten for hundreds of years, since the time of the feudal lords and which the old baron does not know about himself, but which young Maxim was fortunate enough to find—you remember it?"

"I should say that I *do* remember it."

"I used that to visit the castle every evening. In fact I obtained permission to build myself a small hut near Blitzen Mountain, and quite near to the entrance to the underground passage, and every night as soon as it was dark, I went through it to the castle."

Nick nodded.

"The result was," continued Trevelyan, "that there was mighty little that went on inside that old pile of stone that I didn't know about. I couldn't go there during the daytime, of course, but every night found me there, and I remained until the whole bunch had retired, so I kept a rather clear idea of their doings."

"You had no difficulty in overhearing their consultations, eh?"

"None at all. I had only to hide myself among the draperies—you remember what a profusion of them there is everywhere in the old castle, of course."

"Yes."

"You will remember that at the time we made our escape with the princess and young Maxim and fled across the frontier into Belgium, we thought it strange that we were not pursued—that we did not once hear that the baron had even taken the trouble to chase us?"

"Yes."

"There are several reasons for that. One was that during that very night the old man had an acute attack of gout which rendered him helpless for several days, and another was that not one of the searching-parties that were sent out took the road that we did. They believed that we would make for the French or the Swiss frontier.

"Now, another thing: You remember that you fastened an old serving-man, named Emile, to a chair in the room where you found the princess. Well, you gave him a smell or two of chloroform as an additional precaution, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"You didn't give him enough; or you remained in that room too long a time talking, after young Maxim appeared on the scene. Anyhow, Emile woke up sufficiently to hear considerable of what was said, and to recognize young Maxim."

"So! The old baron knew then who had rescued the princess, did he?"

"Yes; and, fortunately, he knew more than that."

"What more? And why fortunately?"

"Emile heard you explain to the princess how you had entered the castle—by means of a rope that you had succeeded in stringing across the moat from the bank to the castle. The baron took it that all of you made your escape in the same way, and therefore has never suspected that the old and forgotten secret entrance from Blitzen Mountain had been discovered."

"I understand. He does not suspect that even now?"

"No. Well, it was but a day or two after I got there when the baron sent for Eitel von Uhler to come to him. I happened to overhear their first interview. It was funny—if one should choose to view it in that light."

"I wonder that you did not, because of your friendship with Von Uhler, call him aside and tell him the whole story later on."

"There were a hundred good reasons for not doing that; but most of all I believed that I could make better use of him later on. I preferred to let the baron work out his plot as he had started it, rather than to have him think up another which might escape me."

"And you were right. Go on."

"Firt, he told Eitel a lot of lies that were just sufficiently spiced with the truth to make them palatable to an honest man; and the substance of them was—well, it was honestly laughable. I wonder that Eitel placed any credence upon it at all."

"What was it? You haven't told me yet."

"He reminded Von Uhler of the first encounter between Maxim and the princess—a time when her horse had become lamed and Maxim went to her assistance."

"Yes."

"Then the baron trumped up a story about frequent meetings between the pair after that, and he actually had the gall to make the assertion that young Maxim had hypnotized her, and having her in his power by that means, had induced her to run away with him, had deceived her by a mock marriage, taken her to Castle Craig, kept her there by force and against her will—and all that. The telling of the story was a masterpiece, and Von Uhler swallowed it whole.

"After that, of course, the baron went on to say that after the princess was taken from the place where Maxim had concealed her, it was thought best to pretend that she was ill as the result of an accident—and then he went on to tell the prettiest story you ever heard of how Maxim had forced his way into the castle when the drawbridge was down and the portcullis raised and had again stolen the princess away.

"There isn't any use of going farther into that, save that the old man succeeded in convincing Eitel that the

princess was only sinned against and had not wilfully sinned and—here was his master-stroke."

"Well?"

"The baron has no son—no heir; so he promised Eitel von Uhler that if he would devote himself to assisting the baron in rescuing Wanda and bringing her back to Germany, Von Uhler could make her his wife and he—the baron—would bequeath all of his immense estates and his vast wealth to Von Uhler. There you have the secret of Eitel's presence here."

"It was a bold play."

"It was a successful play.

"It was after that they began to lay their plans. Of course, I could not hear any of their talks which took place during the daytime, but all their consultations at night I did overhear. The chief of the German secret police was sent for and taken into their confidence. He recommended the two German spies who accompanied them to this country. He also gave them a letter to somebody in Paris, through whom they secured the services of the three Frenchmen.

"And now, Nick, you know quite as much about the affair as I know.

"What the details of their plans may be, I did not find out. I could not hear all their talks together.

"But they are here in this country. They have come here after Princess Wanda. They will steal her and take her away—and I believe more than that."

"What more?"

"I believe it is the deliberate intention of the old baron—and I don't think that Eitel von Uhler has knowledge of this, or would agree to it if he had—to have Maxwell Maxim murdered, unless he can pursuade Eitel to kill him in some sort of a duel; but anyhow it is unquestionably the baron's purpose to have the child murdered."

"By the way, does Eitel von Uhler know that there is a child?"

"No. It is going to be a part of the baron's play to be surprised and shocked by that information himself. Later, he is going to use it to madden Eitel still more."

"He is a very crafty plotter."

"You're right; he is that. Anyhow, there are three things which I know he intends to do, if he can, and he will let nothing stand in his way of their accomplishment. They are:

"First: To murder the child.

"Second: To steal the princess and take her back to Germany—to Castle Thunder.

"Third: To see to it that Maxwell Maxim does not live to claim his wife again."

Nick Carter was very thoughtful for several minutes after that. Then he said:

"I hope, Trevelyan, that Maxwell Maxim and his father will realize some day what you have done for them by this voluntary act of yours in keeping watch on that old baron. If it had not been for you he might have accomplished all that he has set out to do, and have done it before we had any inkling of his intentions, for he is a crafty old scamp. And again, the fact that we did not discover that we were pursued at the time we made our escape from the castle led me to assume for Maxim and his wife a false idea of their safety. I really supposed that the baron had decided to let things go and to make no effort to find the princess after she fled from his home with her child. I had dismissed the matter from my mind altogether, and but for you——"

"Oh, drop it, Nick! I did no more than my duty, under the circumstances."

"I think you did more than that, old chap. You did a friendly act—and that requires something more than duty."

"He paid me—the old man did—twenty thousand pounds where I hadn't earned one."

"All right. Look at it as you please, your thoughtfulness has probably saved the life of the princess, of her child, and of her husband. Now——"

"Yes?"

"You say you have two good shadows with you?"

"Yes. Two that have worked with me for years in London and on the Continent. I know them thoroughly and can trust them entirely. They are both invaluable in doing precisely what they are told to do, and neither of them is worth a picayune for anything else."

"Good! I had a Frenchman like that with me once, on one of my European cases."

"Who was it?" asked Trevelyan. "I ask, because I fancy that I know; and if it was the man I think, I can assure you that the quality you mention was only one of his plays. He was at heart one of the greatest villains I ever knew, and delighted in nothing so much as serving two masters who were opposed to each other, at the same time."

"I think that is the fellow," said Nick, smiling. "The description sounds quite like him. His name was Jean Latrobe."

"That's the chap!" said Trevelyan. "Now I will tell you something more about Latrobe."

"Well?"

"He is one of the Frenchmen who is here with the baron."

"He is, eh? In that case we have got one of the slickest scoundrels unhung opposed to us."

CHAPTER III.

A POWER THAT RULES THE WORLD.

Trevelyan filled his pipe afresh and Nick lighted another cigar.

"Something has just occurred to me which might not be a bad idea," said the Cornishman presently.

"What is it?" asked Nick.

"When we went to Berlin and from there to Heidelberg together, you took the character of a Scotchman friend of yours, Lord Angus MacGraw."

"Yes. Well, what of it?"

"In that character I introduced you to Eitel von Uhler. Do you remember that?"

"Certainly."

"I recall that all the change you made in your appearance was to be rather red headed, to redden your complexion somewhat, and to wear a stubby, bristling, red mustache.

"You can accomplish the last part of the disguise by permitting your own mustache to grow for about a week, and coloring it a little, can't you?"

"Yes; and I could also color up my own hair with a preparation I have, as I did then. But what of it?"

"Wait a minute, Nick. Where is Lord Angus just now?"

"In Alaska, I believe. I wrote to him about the impersonation. His reply was one whole laugh—just like him. He said that he should return to Vancouver this fall, and sail from there to Japan, and then go home via the Siberian railway."

"Good! Now, wouldn't it possibly be a good play if you should appear unexpectedly at the Mammoth, tomorrow or next day, in the character of Lord Angus?"

"Possibly it would."

"You could recognize Colonel Von Uhler, and Eitel would recognize you. You might do a lot of chatting together, you know; and there might be great possibilities connected with those talks, Nick."

"You are right. I will do it. But you, Treve? I had forgotten for the moment that he knows you like a book."

"Oh, I have already used three disguises since I have been trailing the party, and I shall probably use a good many more before I am through. I don't propose to let him suspect my presence in the country at all—at least not until the last moment."

"Yes. That is best."

"But you think you will try the Lord Angy game? Eh?"

"Yes. I'll drop in there to-morrow, at the Mammoth. If nothing comes of it, I can disappear at an hour's notice."

"Sure."

"I was wondering," said Nick, "about how long a time we might depend upon the baron and his outfit remaining in New York."

"I have thought of that, too. We must remember that they will at least remain here until they have received some definite information about the people they are after. They won't move away from the Mammoth until they know definitely where they are going."

"No; and by the same token, as an Irishman would say, we can keep them there as long as we like," said Nick.

"How will you do that?"

"By arranging to give them a little false information about Maxwell Maxim and his wife."

"Good. I see."

"Now, tell me, is the baron traveling under his own name?"

"No. He calls himself Count Epstein."

"And Von Uhler?"

"He is just plain Herr Uhl. In fact, his name *is* Eitel Uhl von Uhler."

"Well, I think we have talked about them enough for the present. Now, how would you like to take a ride in the auto? And while we are out, we will call upon old Porter Maxim. I happen to know that he is at his country place near Hempstead to-day. We can run out there in a couple of hours."

"Do you think it a good plan, Nick? To let him know about all this? Won't it worry the old chap?"

"No. He would rather know about it; and besides, he is a man of great possibilities. He is as shrewd as the shrewdest, and he isn't afraid of anything. More than that, he likes a fight, and being forewarned he will also be forearmed. He is a born fighter in more ways than one."

"I take it, then, that his son Maxwell and he are considerably alike."

"Young Maxim is a chip off the old block, all right."

"All right. I'm with you. Let's go."

They arrived at Porter Maxim's country seat in the automobile shortly after six o'clock, and they found the multimillionaire smoking a cigar on the veranda of his mansion, which he called a cottage.

"Come along in, Carter," he called to them as soon as he saw them approaching. "I'm glad you come down to see me. I'm all alone. Everybody has gone away and left me this afternoon, and I was just beginning to wonder whether I was lonely or not. Who is that you have with you?"

Nick mounted the steps laughingly and shook hands with the old gentleman.

"This," he said, "is the man whom you have never met, but whom you have been very desirous of knowing. His name is Penryn Trevelyan. Perhaps you will recall the name."

"Eh? What? Trevelyan? Well, well! I'm glad to see you, Mr. Trevelyan. We have had some business together even if it is the first time we ever happened to meet. You have done a lot of excellent work for me, through others; but that last bit was fine. Sit down and make yourself at home. The whole place is yours so long as you wish to make use of it. There will be an old-fashioned supper ready presently. I always have that kind when I am alone. Trevelyan, eh? Say! Don't

you think you were mighty particular about that draft I sent you?"

"I wished to be assured that there was no mistake, Mr. Maxim."

"Well, you got the assurance all right, didn't you?" The old man laughed. "I cabled him, Nick, that if that wasn't enough, he could go to blazes; and if it was too much, he could send it all back to me. I rather expected to get it back, too, he was so mighty touchy about it."

"He put it to a better use that that, Maxim," said Nick.

"I suppose so. He'd be a fool if he didn't—begging your pardon, Trevelyan. I'm rather a blunt old fellow, but not half so black as I am painted."

"I came down here purposely to tell you what Trevelyan did with part of that twenty thousand pounds you sent him." said Nick, "although I suspect he would rather I would put the facts differently. Treve, you can take a walk around the grounds for a few minutes while I relate to Mr. Maxim something that is on my mind. I'll call you after a little."

Trevelyan walked away through the shrubbery, and then Nick told the banker everything as we already know it, omitting nothing.

The old man was sitting up very straight in his chair when Trevelyan returned to the veranda. He had forgotten his cigar, which had gone out, and he was as alert as if he were in his own office at the ticker engineering a big pool in stocks.

"Sit down, Trevelyan," he said rather shortly. "I am not going to make the attempt to thank you for what you have done, for I know you don't want me to; but I appreciate it; I appreciate it. Now, look here. I suppose you know something about that old villain of a baron, don't you?"

"Yes, I know considerable about him, Mr. Maxim."

"Carter tells me that he is a very rich man. Is that true?"

"He is one of the wealthiest men in the German empire; yes, sir."

"Do you happen to know how his money is invested?"

"No. I don't know that. He owns vast estates. He has stock in various corporations——"

"Ah!" The banker rubbed his hands together, in satisfaction. "That's the idea. Now—what corporations?"

"I haven't the slightest idea, sir."

"Well, never mind that. I can easily find out all about him through my Berlin branch; and if I don't find a way to pinch him in a way that he will least expect, my name is not Porter Maxim. Come here to make war upon my son, will he? Come here to conspire against the happiness of my daughter Wanda, will he? I'll show him."

Nick chuckled.

"I had not thought of that possibility," he said.

"No?" replied Maxim. "Then you had not thought of the one way in which, with my power, I can make him literally squeal. While you and Trevelyan are following him up along your own lines, I'll take his trail in the financial world, and if I don't make his American trip cost him a pretty penny, I'll eat my hat. I'll keep the ocean cables burning hot to-morrow, boys."

"Where is Maxwell and his wife and child, just now?" asked Nick.

"They are on one of my ranches; the one in Montana," was the reply.

"Is it pretty well known about town, among their set, where they are?" asked Nick again.

"No. They are just traveling in the West. That is the information that has gone out. I saw a notice in the society columns of the *Herald* to-day that they were expected back in New York again, this week—but I happen to know that it isn't true. But that is the advice that the baron and his outfit will receive. Say, Carter, how the devil did the newspapers find out that Max's wife is a princess? Do you know?"

"No. Has it been found out?"

"Found out! Haven't you seen the *Herald* to-day?"

"No. I was just about to look it over when Trevelyan arrived. There was nothing about it in any of the other papers."

"Well, the *Herald* had it. They gave it almost a page. I wish those confounded papers would let us fellows alone—but they won't."

"And you would be as mad as a hatter if they did, Maxim. You know that. What did the article say?"

"Shall I get it for you?"

"No; tell me about it."

"Oh, well, there was a lot of tommy-rot about a great romance in Germany which wasn't at all true or anywhere near the facts of the case."

"Of course."

"And then it told about her being a princess, allied to all the royal families of Europe, and an heiress to duchies and principalities and empires, too, I suppose. It said that she was once betrothed to a crowned head and broke the engagement because of Max; and—well, isn't that enough? It made me sick!"

"It sounds rather as if it were inspired," replied Nick, "although I can't just now see what the object would be. Can you, Treve?"

"No. Still, the old baron is a sly customer."

"Sly, is he?" exclaimed Maxim. "I'll make him shy before I am through with him. I'll make him shy of a few millions—of every cent of his fortune if I can find a way to get at it. I'll do it if I have to buy up the whole of Germany to get at him. Boys, you can talk as much as you please about thirteen-inch guns winning battles, but it is dollars that win them every time. The guns are

only a side-issue. Gold does the real work. I'll break that baron for this!"

Nick laughed heartily.

"I wouldn't care to have you for an enemy, Maxim," he said.

"No; and I wouldn't care to have *you* in that position, either, Carter. But thank God we are friends—and good, solid friends, too! Eh?"

"You never said anything truer than that, sir!"

"I know it; and between you and me and Trevelyan, we'll make that old baron look like thirty cents."

CHAPTER IV.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY.

It was just noon of the following day when Nick Carter, disguised in the character that had been agreed upon between him and Trevelyan, walked in at the lobby of the great hotel in New York which we designate as the Mammoth.

He strolled up and down the corridors for a while. Then he visited the writing-room. After a little he looked in at the café, and in this manner he spent rather more than an hour and had begun to think that he would not be fortunate enough to meet Colonel Von Uhler that day, when the two came suddenly face to face directly in front of the hotel desk.

It was part of Nick's game to force the German to make the first advances, and so he looked him calmly straight in the face without so much as a sign that they had ever met before.

He saw Von Uhler give a start and stop in his tracks, and so he did the same, thus forcing the German to speak—which he did at once.

"Pardon me, sir, for staring," he said, "but I am sure that we have met somewhere before. Ah, now I have it. You are Lord Angus MacGraw, are you not?"

"I am," replied Nick, rather coldly; and then his face broke into a smile. "Sure!" he said. "We have met somewhere—but where? Eh? Where?"

"At my club in Berlin, sir. Rather more than a month ago—two months, in fact. I am Colonel Von Uhler, of——"

"Sure! Sure! I remember now, perfectly. You were an old friend of my secretary, who happened at the time to be"—Nick laughed heartily at the recollection—"none other than Penryn Trevelyan, the king's messenger. He was up to some sort of a political game over there—I don't think it ever occurred to him to tell me what it was, but I consented to help him by acting as a sort of buffer, dontcherknow."

"Yes. And you helped him to get away afterward, didn't you?" was the cool question that followed.

Nick was rather startled at this, for it had not occurred to him that Von Uhler would have discovered Trevelyan's connection with the rescue of the princess; but he only laughed and nodded; and then he replied with a shrewd wink of one eye:

"I suppose I did. It was all very funny. I like adventure, you know. I am always doing queer things. I believe I have earned a reputation for that sort of thing, in fact; but that was the first, last, and only time when I entered upon an adventure since I have been Lord Angus MacGraw, without knowing in the least what it was all about. Possibly you can tell me, since you refer to it. Let's sit down somewhere and talk it over."

Nick Carter was delighted.

He had been wondering how in the world he would be able to bring Von Uhler around to the subject he wished to talk about without exciting suspicion, and here was the subject now thrown squarely at him by the other man.

They found a corner where they were alone and seated themselves side by side.

"First, tell me how it happens that you are in America," said the detective. "I was just strolling about the hotel, wondering if I couldn't meet somebody from the other side, when we came face to face, you know."

"I came over with a party," was the uncompromising reply.

"Oh; you travel in parties, do you? I don't like that. There are always too many around to interfere with what a chap really wants to do, you know."

"I made some inquiries for you in London, Lord Angus," said Von Uhler.

"Did you, indeed? So sorry I wasn't there. Should have been delighted to entertain you."

"It wasn't exactly with the idea that you would entertain me that I looked for you," replied the German.

"No? All the same——"

"I wished to ask you some questions about that very affair to which we just referred."

"Oh! You mean that chap Trevelyan, who posed as my secretary? Yes? He's a cute one!"

"Yes. Do you remember the night you came with him to my club to call upon me?"

"Perfectly well. What a fine lot of sketches you have on the walls there; eh? I enjoyed them hugely. I remember that."

"I have recalled the fact since that time that Trevelyan asked me a good many leading questions that night."

"That so? What about? Eh?"

"About the princess—Princess Wanda von Combroch, niece of Baron Graf Von Buhlmach—whom you afterward abducted from her uncle's castle," was the calm reply.

For a moment after this astounding speech Nick stared at the German in well-simulated amazement, as if he could not find the exact words he wished to use in reply. Then he started suddenly to his feet, and he made his

eyes flash as if with anger, as he replied hotly, although in a subdued tone:

"I think there must be some mistake about your identity, sir. The Colonel Von Uhler to whom I was introduced in Berlin was at least a gentleman. You are evidently an impostor, and a cad, or you would know better than to make such a charge as that—to me, sir."

He turned on his heel and strode away; but he had not taken three steps before the German was after him with a bound.

"Lord Angus!" he exclaimed. "I pray that you will accept my apologies. Permit me at least to explain."

Nick stopped and turned upon him coolly. Then he said:

"It doesn't seem to me as if an explanation were possible. However, I will listen. You have made an extraordinary statement, and if there is an explanation to account for it, I should be exceedingly glad to hear it."

"Will you resume your seat?"

"Yes—for the present."

"Do you remember that you said only a moment ago that you entered upon an adventure in company with Trevelyan without in the least knowing what the adventure was about?"

"That sounds to me more like a question than an explanation, sir."

"If you will reply to my questions the explanation will be easier, and you will understand better the mistake I have made and how it was made."

"Very well, sir. Go on."

"You have admitted that the man who posed as your secretary at that time was no other than Penryn Trevelyan, a king's messenger, and also, at times, a detective, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Do you mind telling me how it came about that you permitted such—such a circumstance to exist?"

"I won't mind in the least telling you after I have heard your promised explanation, provided it is a satisfactory one; but I want the explanation before I reply to such questions."

"You consented to that imposition, however, did you not?"

"Yes. For a joke."

"It proved to be much more than a joke."

"Did it? I haven't yet discovered just how it did, sir."

"Did he never give you an inkling about what that adventure was to be?"

"I think I have already replied to that question. I did it before we seated ourselves."

"Did you travel with Trevelyan to Heidelberg and to Hellmuth?"

"Yes."

"And to the castle of Baron Von Buhlmach? It is called Castle Thunder, in English."

"Oh! yes."

"Did you not see the interior of that castle, Lord Angus?"

"What the devil—— Are you going to insult me again? I never saw the castle in my life, sir, when the drawbridge was not raised and the portcullis down." A statement, by the way, which was strictly true.

"I see, sir, that it is only an additional affront to you to pursue this topic in the manner I am doing it. I will——"

"I am glad, colonel, that you are getting wise to that fact, as they say here in America," was the dry response, or, rather, interruption.

"I will tell you exactly why Penryn Trevelyan visited that section of Germany."

"I wish to Heaven you would."

"I don't suppose you are overwell acquainted with him, are you "

"I never saw him in my life until the very day we started on that trip to Germany."

"Humph! Well, he went there for the sole purpose of abducting the princess to whom I referred a moment ago when you got angry—and somehow he made you an unconscious partner in his schemes and an unknowing conspirator with him."

"You don't say so! Well, I like his cheek."

"It is true, sir. He used you as a cloak by which to hide his real designs. His aim was the castle of the graf; his object was the Princess Wanda—and he succeeded in stealing her away from the protection of her legal guardians."

"Eh? What's that? Do you mean to tell me that all alone he broke into a castle that is one of the strongest old forts in all Germany, and that he carried a princess away by force, and without her consent? My dear sir, with all due respect to you and your informants, it is evident to me that somebody has been making game of you."

"Wait. I will tell you the story."

"I wish you would do so."

"More than two years ago there was attending college at Heidelberg a young American of vast wealth. He was a handsome chap, daring, and, as I have said, vastly rich. His father is a great banker in this country."

"But what has all that to do——"

"One moment, please. One day, when Princess Wanda was riding with a party of friends—I was one of that party—she fell behind the rest of us. Her horse stumbled and became lamed, although the princess was not hurt. The young American to whom I have referred entered upon the scene at that moment, and offered his services. In that manner the two became acquainted."

"Jove! That's a dandy romance. I'd like to have been in on that!"

"After that, these two met frequently, presumably by

accident at first, but afterward by design. The acquaintance ripened into love; but of course the American understood that no matter what his wealth happened to be, he could not aspire to the hand of a German princess. Being an Englishman your——"

"I'm a Scotchman, sir."

"It's all the same. Acknowledging the rule of a king yourself, you can readily understand what I mean."

"Yes."

"The upshot of the affair was that the American persuaded the princess to elope with him, and when he had obtained her consent to the step, he leased and furnished a beautiful place for her, where they afterward lived under an assumed name."

"You don't say so! Right there in Ger——"

"But here is the point, sir," interrupted Von Uhler. "The young man did not dare apply for a marriage license; he did not dare to use any minister or priest of the country, for fear of being found out, and so he imposed upon the princess a man who represented himself as clothed with authority to pronounce the marriage ceremony."

"Great Cæsar! A princess, too!"

"Of course, she knew nothing of this."

"I should say not. But go on. Do."

"Of course, the time was not long before the princess was traced. Her place of hiding became known to her uncle. He was forced to use strenuous means in carrying out his rescue of the princess, and I regret to say that in doing so a young woman who acted as her maid was unfortunately killed. But the accident resulted in the maid's death was made use of. The body was dressed in the clothing of the princess, and the false husband was allowed to see it."

"Great——"

"Wait, sir. I haven't finished yet."

CHAPTER V.

UNMASKING THE BARON'S PLOTS.

"What you tell me, sir, is the most amazing thing I ever heard. But what I cannot understand as yet is where I come in on the deal."

"I am coming to that."

"Oh! All right."

"You will perhaps not sympathize with what the old Count Von Buhlmach did after that, but you must understand that he is descended from a long line of feudal lords who have been accustomed for centuries to taking the law into their own hands, particularly when one of their blood had been made to suffer. The baron is such a man as that. Indeed, he has still much of the barbarian in him. He almost believes that he has the right of life and death over his hereditary subjects. There are many such in Prussia today."

"Yes. I know it. Go on."

"When the young American returned to his home where he kept the deceived princess and saw the dead body of the maid dressed in the clothing of the princess, he believed it to be the princess, indeed. He was permitted to approach near enough for that; and then he was arrested. Later, he was shown proofs, made up, of course, which would have established his guilt of the crime that had been committed—he supposing the victim to be the princess."

The supposed Lord Angus nodded silently.

"However, he managed to make his escape almost at once. Afterward in some manner he made the discovery that it was not the body of the princess he had seen. He found out that she still lived."

"Go on," said Nick, when the German paused in his story.

"Right there, sir, my definite information ceases. It is supposed that after he discovered that the princess was alive, he determined to repossess himself of her again, and that to that end he visited England, where he secured the services of this man Trevelyan, whom I had the misfortune to know well at one time."

"Ah! I am beginning to see it all now."

"Yes."

"And, also, the young American millionaire must have sent to the United States for an American to assist Trevelyan, for it appears that there was a man mixed up in the affair who was named Carter. Probably you did not meet him, sir."

"I was with Trevelyan. There was no third member of our party—as you ought to know."

"Well, Trevelyan and the American found a means of entering the castle. One of them—the American, doubtless—threw a rope from across the moat, over an image on one of the towers, and by that means they climbed across. At all events, they found the princess, bound and gagged her attendants, and took her away from the castle—and they made good their escape to this country."

"You don't tell me! Anyhow, it was a plucky thing to do; eh? And the princess must have come away from there willingly. Don't you think so?"

"It is possible, although I am not sure about it. More than likely she was drugged and brought away by force. But whether that is the fact or not, we must not forget that she believed herself to be the wife of the man who stole her away, and that—at one time, at least—she loved him."

"That's so. Do you mean to assure me, Colonel Von Uhler, that all that you have told me about stealing the princess from the castle happened while I—happened with my unwilling and unconscious assistance?"

"It looks very much that way, sir. It is strange that

you never suspected what he was—what Trevelyan was up to."

"It is rather strange, isn't it? So that is why you thought I was a party to the abduction, is it?"

"Yes. Do you blame me, sir?"

"Well, no. I can't say that I do, colonel."

"And now will you accept my apology?"

"Certainly. Forget it. But look here."

"Well?"

"That all must have happened about a month ago, didn't it?"

"Yes."

"Did the young millionaire—— But, of course he did. I saw something about it in one of the papers yesterday."

"Ah. The article in the *Herald*. But what was the question you were about to ask, Lord Angus?"

"I was going to ask if he brought the princess to this country, and what had become of her since that time. She she is here, of course. The paper said so; and it said also that there is a child. Eh? What? You saw it, didn't you?"

"Yes, I saw the article."

"Then it stands to reason that the young chap has made that marriage good, doesn't it? Even if you are right—which I doubt for some reason—about the first affair being a fake. Don't you think he has done, in that case, the thing that they call on this side of the water 'making good'?"

"Yes; but even so, that does not atone for the original wrong."

"Are you sure that such a wrong was committed, Colonel Von Uhler?"

"I am so informed on the very best authority."

"If that authority happens to be the old barbarian baron, I should take it with about a ton of salt, if I were you."

"You don't suppose he would lie about it, do you?"

"I think that a man who would murder an unoffending valet and dress her body in the clothes of her mistress, and who afterward would manufacture evidence to accuse another of the crime, would not scruple about a few set phrases in relating the story to you, if he happened to have any object in deceiving you. Will you pardon me, colonel, if I ask you a few very pointed questions, purely with the motive of friendship?"

"Yes, if I may rely upon your discretion concerning what I have already told you."

"You may do that. I'll promise you right now that if I have an opportunity to do so I will stand the princess' friend until the last gun fires, and I'll help anybody to kill the man who wrongs her, or who has wronged her. Is that strong enough?"

"Quite so."

"And I may ask the questions?"

"Yes."

"I'm rather a blunt sort of chap. Don't forget that."

"All right, my lord."

"In the first place, you are in love with the princess yourself, aren't you? You need not answer. I see it—in fact, I saw it from the first."

"Well?"

"Has the old baron promised you that if you take her back to Germany you may marry her yourself?"

"That is rather a personal question, but I will answer it. Yes, he has."

"And I suppose he will leave you his entire fortune as well; eh?"

"Really, sir——"

"Say yes. Don't get hot, now."

"Yes, then."

"Well, sir, has it occurred to you that such a thing would be impossible—unless somebody should conveniently put the present husband out of the way? Murder him, in fact?"

"But——"

"I don't think there are any buts, Colonel Von Uhler. That is a plain statement of fact, is it not?"

"I suppose so—if there has been a legal marriage since they came here."

"In the first place, Von Uhler, I believe that there was a legal marriage from the beginning. If you are inclined to make a wager on the subject, I'll lay you ten thousand pounds English gold against as many German marks, which are worth about twenty cents apiece, or something less than a shilling, that I am right. In the second place, men do not deceive princesses with false marriages. Sometimes a shop-girl, or a girl who has no protectors, falls into a snare of that sort, but I have yet to learn of a princess who has done so, and it is not logical to suppose that this young millionaire to whom you refer would even have thought of such a thing. But, anyhow, no matter what is said, they are married now, all right."

"I don't *know* that."

"Yes, you do, too. A man and woman who live together as man and wife, and acknowledge themselves as such, in the State of New York, are legally married, and nothing short of death or a divorce can separate them, either."

"Is that true?"

"Sure it's true. Now I am coming to the rest of my questions."

"Well, sir?"

"I suppose you are over here looking for the princess, eh?"

"Frankly, we are."

"We, eh? Is the old baron with you?"

"He is with us, but he is traveling incognito."

"To be sure he is. Why shouldn't he? But again you used the plural in a peculiar way. Are there more in your party than yourself and the baron?"

"Several more. Five more, in fact."

"Huh! What are they? Thugs?"

"My lord, do you suppose that I——"

"Certainly not; that is, not willingly. But don't you think that it is quite as possible for you to be imposed upon concerning the real object of the old baron's trip to this country, as it was for Lord Angus MacGraw to fall into the same sort of a trap?"

"But in my case——"

"Pardon me, but in your case you are blinded by the little god; and he can take the cake when it comes to throwing dust in a man's eyes. You are in love, and you would like to strangle that young millionaire because you have been led to believe that he has wronged the woman to whom you have given your heart."

Von Uhler made no reply to this.

"Now, look here, colonel, supposing you should suddenly come face to face with the princess. Suppose you should tell her all that you have just told me. Suppose she should tell you—as I believe she would do—that it is all rot. Suppose she should tell you that she has been the young fellow's wife from the very first; that her uncle had persecuted her; that she was a prisoner in the castle of the old baron, and was there treated with great cruelty; suppose she should tell you that she adores her husband, and that he makes her life perfectly happy—*what would you do in that case?*"

"I don't know. I do not know."

"Pardon me, but you *do* know; or if you don't know what you would do in a case like that, *I know for you.*"

Still the German made no reply; and Nick continued:

"You would fall on your knees and ask the pardon of the princess for ever having thought that wrong could ever touch her; could live in the same atmosphere with her. You would—but what's the use of all this? It is my settled opinion, Von Uhler, that you are being made a tool of for the purposes of a selfish and savage old reprobate. I told you I was blunt."

"You certainly told the truth about it."

"Sure; and I usually come pretty near to hitting the nail on the head, too. And now there is another thing that you had best be on your guard against."

"What is that, sir?"

"That I wouldn't be afraid to bet that the old baron has been playing upon your feelings until he has got you to a point where you are about ready to kill the husband of the princess yourself—and I think that is precisely what his game is, Von Uhler."

CHAPTER VI.

THE BARON'S FIRST VISIT.

The detective had just finished the rather unpleasant remark, and was in the act of turning to raise the curtain in the window, when he discovered that the old baron was approaching them, and was already so close at hand that for the detective to avoid the meeting would be impossible—even had Nick desired to do so; and he was not quite sure in his own mind whether he wished to greet the graf or not, just at that moment.

However, there was no help for it, so he sat still until the gigantic figure of the hard old man loomed in front of them.

It was the first knowledge that Uhler had of the presence of the baron, and he started rather guiltily, a fact which pleased Nick Carter, for he saw in that motion the evidence that the German officer had been impressed by what the detective had said to him.

The baron was a man of massive build. It was evident that he was descended from a line of giants.

It was not that he was so extraordinarily tall, being probably something beyond six feet; but it was the massiveness of his proportions that impressed one.

His shoulders were ponderously wide; his chest bulged like a prize-fighter's, and was wonderfully deep. Everything about him was big, from his leonine head, with its mass of iron-gray hair, like a mane, to his thighs and feet; and although he was doubtless past seventy years of age, Nick had not a doubt that he still possessed great strength and remarkable agility, too.

His countenance was of the same general cast as his old chief, Bismarck; his eyes were penetrating and keen, and were half-concealed beneath shaggy, overhanging brows; and Nick realized as he looked upon him that here was a man who had never acknowledged any law that was greater than his own iron will.

He came directly to the corner where they were seated, and stopped; and it was then that Von Uhler looked up and discovered him.

"I have been waiting for you, Eitel," he said coldly, in German.

The younger man started to his feet.

"Ah, yes," he replied. "I met with an old acquaintance. Permit me to present him to you, please. My lord, Angus MacGraw—Count Epstein." It will be remembered that Trevelyan had told Nick that the baron was traveling under the name of Count Epstein.

The baron bowed coldly—frigidly, in fact.

"You are a Scotchman?" he said, in English.

"The name should be sufficient warrant of that," was the reply.

"And are here for some time? Here in New York, I mean?"

"My stay is rather indefinite; but I doubt if you will see me after to-day."

Then, suddenly, and rather to Nick's surprise, the baron became very gracious. The detective was instantly to discover why.

"I suppose you visit this country frequently?" he said, indulging in a grimace which did duty for a smile.

"It has been said of me that I know this country better than the other side," replied Nick Carter.

"Then of course you have many acquaintances here, sir?"

"Yes. A great many." And to himself the detective thought: "Now, I wonder what the old codger is getting at?"

"I have been thinking this morning," continued the baron, "that I would like to make some arrangements with a banking-house here which does business in my country. I was about to ask some questions at the desk, but possibly you can supply me with the information I want."

"Oh," said Nick, "there are several large banking-houses in the city which have branches all over Europe. There is J. P. Morgan & Co., Kountz Brothers, the Seligmans, Porter Maxim & Co.; and there are smaller houses, also. Any one of those would be glad to arrange your banking facilities for you, count."

"Mmmm! Yes. Thank you. The names are known to me. Do you happen, my lord, to have an acquaintance with the head of any of those houses?"

"I know old Porter Maxim quite well—that is, as well as a person can know him who has seen him only occasionally, in the line of business, you know."

"Yes. Yes. Mmm! Thank you, sir."

"Would it be any accommodation to you if I should offer my services in conducting you to the offices of Maxim & Co.? If old Porter is about, I could present you to him."

"Why, sir, if it would not be too much trouble——"

"No trouble at all, count; only—if it is your wish to go there to-day we must start at once. There isn't any too much time as it is, sir."

"Thank you. Yes, I would like to go there now. Will you accompany us, Eitel?"

Von Uhler hesitated, and he glanced sharply at Nick. In the light of the story he had just related to the supposed Scottish peer, he could not at all understand the very palpable suggestion from him that the old baron should do his banking business through the father of the young man who had run away with the princess—and then he remembered that he had not mentioned that young man's name. And then he remembered, also, that "Lord Angus" had himself spoken of having seen the article that was printed in the *Herald* the preceding morning.

At any rate, he did not understand it; but he replied that he would go with them.

They were whirled to Wall Street through the sub-terranean, and quickly to Broad Street, and a little before three o'clock they entered the offices of Porter Maxim & Co.

Nick had had neither time nor opportunity to send word to Maxim that he was coming, or what his purpose was; but still he had every confidence in the shrewdness of the old gentleman. The only real danger in the coming encounter was the possibility that Trevelyan might be with the banker and that thus he and Von Uhler would be brought unexpectedly together.

In the main office he inquired if the banker was in and he gave his card to an attendant—that is one of the "Lord Angus" cards that he had provided long ago, for use in this character—and he rather ostentatiously scribbled upon it with his pencil.

He correctly guessed that the baron would suppose that his penciled lines were merely a request that he might be permitted to present two friends to the banker. In reality he wrote only three words. They were: "Carter." And beneath that he wrote: "Be cautious."

The attendant returned immediately and asked the three gentlemen to follow him, and they were ushered inside, where to Nick's relief he found the old banker alone in his office. He was standing in the center of the room with one hand resting upon the table, and he looked the personification of an ideal banker who is waiting to receive honored guests.

As Nick entered with the baron and the colonel, Maxim took a step toward them and said quickly:

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Lord Angus. You have come just in time, too. In another half-hour I should have been gone."

"Ah, Mr. Maxim, *so* glad to see you! I have come to-day for the purpose of presenting these gentlemen. Let me introduce Count Epstein, of Berlin, who desires to transact some business through your house. And this is Colonel Von Uhler."

"Be seated, gentlemen," said the banker. "It is a pleasure to make the acquaintance of friends of Lord Angus MacGraw. Have you been long in the city, count?"

"No. We arrived yesterday. I have some letters of credit here which I would like to place on deposit with you, sir;" and the baron drew them from his pocket and passed them over to the banker, who glanced through them and then touched a bell at his elbow; and then for a few moments the time was taken up with the formalities of opening an account.

"This is a wonderful city of yours, Mr. Maxim," said the baron, after that was done. "I am charmed with it, sir."

"No doubt; most foreigners are. We are a very fast set over here, however. We don't do business as they do in the older countries."

Mmmm!" mumbled the baron; and he left his chair and offered his hand to the banker.

"I will not detain you any longer now," he said, in his most pompous manner. Then to Von Uhler: "Eitel, I think we had better be getting back. Lord Angus, I am greatly indebted to you. Will you return with us, or——"

"I am not going to permit you to drag Lord Angus away with you if he will remain," the banker interrupted; "and I should be glad, count—and you, also, colonel—if you would be in less haste."

But the baron had evidently accomplished the purpose of his call, whatever that was, and was now in haste to be gone; and the result was that, two minutes later, the banker and Nick found themselves alone—and then Trevelyan stepped out from another room and joined them.

"Ah!" said Nick. "I had an idea that you might be here. It is lucky that you thought to get out of sight before Von Uhler saw you. He sure has got it in for you about that abduction from the castle. He charged me with it, too; but I got out of it; and now he lays the whole thing to you and a fellow from America named Carter."

"It was the word 'caution' on the card you sent in that warned me. I knew that something was up. How in the world did you manage to induce the old baron to come here?"

"I didn't induce him to come at all. He asked me to bring him."

"Eh?"

"He did, for a fact. He began by asking me about bankers in general and remained mute until I mentioned Maxim's name. But he jumped for that like a trout after a fly—and I very generously offered to bring him down and introduce him."

"I see. But what was his game?"

"You can search me, Treve."

The banker had not spoken yet; but now he looked up with a smile.

"I think," he said, "that the baron merely wished to see me."

"What for?" asked Trevelyan.

"He wanted to size me up, that's all. He has broken the ice now. If it should happen at any time that he really wished to see me alone, he knows now that he would only have to send in his card to be admitted at once. He had no definite idea in coming here to-day more than to blaze a pathway for something that might happen later. He is a deep old rascal, Carter, and that big old head of his has brains inside it."

"Well," said the detective, "if there isn't anything in particular that you would like to see me about, I'm going to get back to my rooms, shed 'Lord Angy,' and appear again at the Mammoth—and I think that Treve had better go with me."

Outside, Nick called a cab.

"Get in here," he said to Trevelyan. "It will offset the probability of your being seen and recognized, and besides I want to talk to you."

"All right. What have you got on your mind, Nick?"

"First, you must get into a disguise and keep in one. If either of those men I brought down-town to-day should get an idea that you are in town they would tumble to the fact that they are watched. And we don't want them to do that."

"I won't let them see me."

"See that you do not. Now, has Maxim communicated with his son to-day?"

"Yes."

"What is the reply?"

"Young Max has no idea of returning to town for another month."

"Is his party at the ranch in Montana?"

"Yes. But they are leaving there to-day for another ranch of the banker's in Nevada."

"Do you know why?"

"No. Only a change of base, I suppose."

"Well, Treve, we must not let the baron and his outfit get out of our sight at all—not for a minute. Since I have seen the baron I have come to the conclusion that we are up against a tougher proposition than we supposed. He's a crafty old chap and as hard as nails. More than that, he has a well-defined idea as to what he is to do and he intends to do it, too. Here we are now. Get into some sort of disguise and go with me to the Mammoth, for I want to talk with those two 'shadows' you brought over with you."

CHAPTER VII.

THE BARON MAKES HIS SECOND MOVE.

There was a surprise in store for Nick Carter when he arrived at the Hotel Mammoth accompanied by Trevelyan, who was now in appearance merely an English tourist who had not one characteristic appearance about him to connect him with the personality of the shrewd Scotland Yard detective.

Nick, also, had done away with his former disguise and appeared now in his own proper person. However, as he was passing the desk, one of the clerks called to him and then drew him aside.

"Mr. Carter," he said, "you were in here to-day, weren't you—in disguise?"

"Yes, Tommy. Why?"

"You nodded to me and I guessed that it was you. Will you tell me what name you used in that disguise?"

"Lord Angus MacGraw. Why?"

"Well, we have had several guests here since yesterday who have gone away rather suddenly. About an hour ago one of them came to me and asked me if Lord Angus MacGraw was stopping here; and when he asked the question I remembered that he was a chap whom I had seen talking with you, so I put two and two together and decided that he was asking for you. See?"

"Yes. That was bright of you, Tommy. What more?"

"I told him that Lord Angus wasn't stopping here just now, but that he was in and out all the time, and he asked me if I would give a note to him. Here it is. I suppose it is for you, isn't it?"

"Yes. There is no doubt of that. Thank you, Tommy."

Nick opened the note and read:

"'My Dear Lord Angus: I regret that I shall not have the pleasure of talking with you again. The things you said to me have impressed me more than you can guess. A sudden change in our plans has rendered it imperative that we leave the city at once, and I have no idea of the time of our return. But I shall look you up in London. Eitel Uhl von Uhler.'

"Thank you, Tommy," said Nick, again; then he turned to Trevelyan and drew him aside.

"Read that," he said.

Trevelyan read the note and frowned.

"Where are those two 'best shadows in Europe' of yours?" asked Nick.

"There is one of them seated over in that corner, appearing as if he were half-asleep. I don't know where the other one is."

"It is my opinion," said Nick, "that this one is entirely asleep, and that the other one is dead. Anyhow, they are no good. What is this fellow's name?"

"Crabtree."

"And the other one—what is his name?"

"Crawfish."

"They seem to be well named, Treve. Come along." He wheeled in his tracks and crossed rapidly to the door where the 'shadow' was seated.

"Crabtree," he said, in a tone which made the man start, "what has become of the people you are supposed to be watching?"

"Who the devil are you?" was the reply.

"I am your chief for the present. Here is Mr. Trevelyan. Now answer my question."

"They are up-stairs in their rooms, I suppose."

"You suppose! Don't you know?"

"I wait down here. Craw waits up above. It is up to him now."

"Oh, is it? Well, let me tell you something. You are no good. While you have been sitting here asleep, your birds have flown. They have gone, hook, line, bob, and sinker." He turned to Trevelyan.

"Put this fellow off, Treve," he said. "Give him enough for the other one, too, if you do not think there is danger of his swiping it—and tell him that you don't want to see either of them again."

"Look here—sure!" said Crabtree, with a show of anger. "What do you mean by insinuating that I could—"

"Shut up!" said Nick. "If I hear another word out of you, you'll be sorry. If I should tell you all that I think of you, you wouldn't like to hear it. But it is my opinion that you and your pal have deliberately gone and sold out to the other side. If I had proof of it I would make you wish that you had never been born. Now, get! And if your face looms up in front of me again, I'll smash it!"

Nick did not wait to hear what Trevelyan had to say to the man, but turned away to the desk again and sought Tommy.

"How many are there in that party that left here?" he asked.

"Eight. An old count with a guest and a valet, and five others whom I don't know anything about."

"Have you any idea where they went?"

"No. Perhaps the head porter——"

"Wait, Tommy. I can't spare the time to run around from one to another to find out about them. I want you to set all the machinery of this hotel to work at once to find out all there is to know about them, and each one of them. I want to know where they went; if they all went together, and what the destinations were. How long will that take?"

"Half an hour."

"I'll wait right here in sight of the desk."

Trevelyan and the detective seated themselves together to wait.

"Do you guess what has happened?" asked Nick.

"No. Do you?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"The baron has set some machinery of his own at work as soon as he arrived here, and by that means he has found out several things."

"What?"

"He has found out where young Maxim and his wife are now. I think he knows that as well as we do. He has also been smart enough to find out that he and his party were shadowed. I haven't a doubt that he has brought over a shadow or two himself, whose business it is to hang in the rear and find out if the old baron is watched. Anyhow, he has discovered your two experts (!)—and he has bought all the information they had to give."

"Jove! Nick, do you think that?"

"Yes."

"Then Von Uhler knows that I am here."

"Without a doubt."

"And that you——"

"No. Your shadows knew nothing about my disguise as Lord Angy. But the point is that the baron and his outfit have eluded us. They have got away without giving us the least idea about it."

"But we know where to look for them, Nick."

"Sure. We will look for them at the hotel where

we will look for young Maxim and his wife; but we don't know what the baron is up to in the meantime. Wait a minute. Here comes Tommy. He has found out something by this time."

The clerk came and dropped into a seat beside Nick; then he looked inquiringly at Trevelyan.

"He's all right," said the detective. "What have you found out, Tommy?"

"The entire party sailed at five o'clock this afternoon, on the *Casanovia*, for Liverpool."

"Rats, Tommy! They didn't do any such thing."

"They did, Mr. Carter. Really."

"Go on. Tell me what you know about it."

"They were taken to the steamer in two carriages. A special baggage-wagon took down the trunks. The drivers are here in the house now, and they saw the party board the steamer. Not one of them came ashore again, and——"

"And that's all, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, Tommy, they have fooled you, and they think they have fooled me; but they haven't."

"Do you mean that they didn't sail?"

"Sure that is what I mean."

"But the drivers say——"

"It doesn't make any difference what the drivers say. I haven't any sort of doubt that *a* party sailed; and that *the* party that *did* sail did so under the names of the party that left here; but, all the same, the party that was here and is supposed to have sailed for Liverpool this afternoon is still in this country. You can bank on that. It was a clever move, Treve," he added, turning to his friend. "Almost too clever, in fact."

"Why?"

"Don't you see that the old baron had to deceive Von Uhler, as well as us? If Von Uhler had had any idea that he was going to sail for Europe, he would have said so; *and if he had suspected they were going to pretend to sail for Europe he would have taken pains to give me the impression that they had done so.*"

"That sounds reasonable."

"Well, I want you to go and look up some time-tables. Find out the quickest way for us to get to the place where Maxwell Maxim and his wife are staying. Then buy two tickets through, if you can."

"And you——"

"I know that we will take the 8:30 train on the New York Central out of New York. If I don't see you at the house when you go after your grip, I will meet you there."

"Where are you going now, Nick?"

"To see Porter Maxim for five minutes before we go away. Can I rely upon you to meet me at that train?"

"Certainly."

"Then let it go at that. But look out for yourself, Treve."

"Why? What do you mean?"

"Don't forget that your two shadows betrayed you. Don't forget that the baron and his party know now that you are on his track. Don't forget that he has got two of the slickest men of the German secret police with him, and don't forget that he has three of the best and most unscrupulous French detectives in his party, either."

"What in blazes has that got to do with me?"

"It has this to do with you: If they can find a means of having you detained in New York, they will do it—and they won't be overparticular about the method of doing it, either—not even if it comes to a rap on the head."

"Nonsense! I'm not afraid of that."

"Which fact makes it all the worse for you. Look out for yourself."

"I will. But what about you?"

"It isn't likely that they know that I am in the game—but all the same I shall act as if they did know it, and as if I were aware that they know it. Don't miss that eight-thirty train."

"That is about the seventh time you have said that. I won't miss it."

"See that you do not—for if you do, I shall go on without you."

"Gee, Nick! You act as if you had the willies."

"I haven't; but I've got the "baronies," if you want to call it that. I realize what we are up against with that outfit. You do not."

CHAPTER VIII.

A CUTTHROAT WITH A PRICE.

Nick Carter arrived at the Grand Central Station at a quarter-past eight and began to look about him at once for Trevelyan.

The time lacked but five minutes of the departure of the train he wished to take, and he had begun to feel some anxiety about his friend, when a strange incident occurred. It did not impress him particularly until he was on the train and speeding toward Albany—but then it suddenly occurred to him that something was wrong.

The incident was this:

He had walked to the gate through which passengers had to pass in order to board the train, when a messenger boy in uniform approached him and, holding out a sealed envelope, asked:

"Is this letter for you, sir?"

A glance told Nick that it was addressed to himself, and he quickly tore it open.

Inside was a long coupon ticket which read to Belmar, Nevada, and with it this note:

"DEAR NICK: I can't get to you for the train. Here is your ticket. Go ahead on this train; I will follow on the next one. If I do not overtake you in St. Louis, leave word, or wait for me at Belmar.

"TREVELYAN.'

The detective gave the boy a quarter, jammed the note into his pocket, and hastened through the gate and aboard of the train.

It happened that the train was very light that night, and that the sleeping-car he boarded was lighter still. In fact, when Nick entered the smoking-compartment at one end of it, and lighted a cigar, there was not a person there.

None entered either, and after a moment the train started.

Then the porter came in, looking around to see who he had, and Nick said to him:

"You are running out rather light to-night, aren't you?"

"Yassir. You is about de onliest passenger we has to-night, suh."

"What? Do you mean to tell me that I am the only passenger on this car?"

"Well, suh, dere was another man here jest befo' de train done started. He give me his grip to hold while he run back to de station after something or other, and he ain't come back unless he caught de last car as we was a-movin' out, suh. If he did, suh, you two will be de onliest ones in de car, sure 'nuff."

The porter had hardly uttered this explanation of the unusual circumstance when the man he had been talking about made his appearance.

"Hello, porter!" he said, with a slightly foreign accent. "I caught the train by the skin of my teeth. No more. It was a narrow shave. Bring me a glass of water."

He lighted a cigar and smoked it in silence for a while, and then as if he had just perceived the fact that there was another person in the smoking-compartment, he said:

"Good evening, sir."

"Good evening," replied Nick; and smoked on.

"That was a narrow escape for me," continued the stranger. "I happened to remember a telegram that I wished to send, and I went back into the station to attend to it. Whew! I came within an ace of being left. This car doesn't seem to be very full to-night, does it?"

"No," said Nick. "We are the only passengers thus far."

"You don't say! The other cars are filled up, I believe."

Nick made no reply.

"Going far?" asked the stranger, after another pause.

"Yes; quite a distance."

"St. Louis?"

Nick nodded.

"So am I. We might as well be jolly together since we are alone in the car? Have a drink, sir? I have some excellent stuff in my bag."

"No; I thank you. I don't use it."

The stranger shrugged his shoulders.

"It is odd," he said presently, "what a lot of people there are nowadays who don't use liquor. Will you accept my card, sir?"

He took an elaborate card-case from his waistcoat pocket, extracted a card, and passed it to the detective, who could do nothing else than accept it; and by way of response he said:

"I don't happen to have a card for you, sir; but my name is Nicholas."

"Thank you, Mr. Nicholas. It is a pleasure to me to encounter some one to whom I can talk when traveling in this country. I suppose you have noticed from my speech that I am not a countryman of yours; eh?"

"It is hardly noticeable. You speak English perfectly."

"Oh, yes, I speak it well enough; but there is a certain twist of the tongue that I can never get quite right. I am a Frenchman, as you have guessed from the card as well as because of my pronunciation; eh?"

"Yes."

"Have you dined? There is a dining-car on the train."

"Yes; I dined before I left the city."

Nick was rather unresponsive to the stranger's advances, and there was a reason for this.

The instant the man entered the compartment, Nick had been impressed with the idea that there was something about him that was familiar, although as they talked together, this impression was gradually dissipated. And still, there was a something about the stranger which the detective did not like.

He was altogether too smooth, for one thing. He was in too great haste to become acquainted; too precipitate.

Nick found himself wondering if by any chance this stranger could be one of the Frenchmen whom the baron had brought over with him.

He was sure that the man was not Latrobe; but, then, Latrobe would hardly have taken this assignment, if the fellow was one of the baron's men, because Latrobe knew that he was known to Nick Carter and that he could not hope to deceive him by any disguise he might assume.

But there were two other Frenchmen besides Latrobe in that outfit, and this man might easily be either of the others.

The train was one of those expresses which do not

stop until Albany is reached; and the two men remained in the smoking-room together until they ran in at that station.

When the train pulled out again, the porter entered the compartment once more.

"I'm sure in hard luck this night," he said, with the freedom that Pullman porters often assume. "It has never happened like this befo' since I've been a porter."

"Did you get any passengers here?" asked Nick.

"No, sir; not one."

"Well, you can make up my berth when you please. I shall turn in soon."

"It is all ready now, suh," was the reply.

Five minutes later Nick bade his companion good night, and went to his berth.

There had not been a word, a gesture, or a thing about the stranger to add to the suspicions of the detective, and he had about made up his mind that he was wrong when he suddenly remembered the circumstance of the receipt of the note and ticket from Trevelyan.

"I wonder," he asked himself, as he climbed into his berth, "if anything has happened to Treve? Now that I think of it, I don't know that I ever saw a scratch of a pen of his handwriting, with the exception of his signature that was appended to a typewritten report of his that I read once about that other case."

But Nick was tired and sleepy, too, and he turned his face toward the window and speedily dropped asleep.

His first recollection after that was in starting awake suddenly in the night, to feel that a hand was stealthily moving over the blanket under which he was lying.

He waited for an instant without moving, in order to make ready to seize that hand as he could hold it; but that instant of hesitation gave the owner of the hand the opportunity he was seeking.

The hand shot quickly upward; wiry fingers of unusual strength gripped the detective's throat and choked him, and at the same instant he felt the prick of a sharp point against his breast, and a voice whispered threateningly in his ear:

"If you struggle or attempt to utter a sound, I will drive this dagger into your heart. I have done the same sort of thing before, Nick Carter, and I know how."

Both of Nick's arms were beneath the blanket, and so for the moment he was handicapped. He could not raise them in time to defend himself if he had tried, and there was nothing for him to do but lie still and await a better opportunity.

The man relaxed his grip upon Nick's throat, but he did not remove the hand; and after a moment he said:

"We are practically alone in the car, I guess. We are the only passengers. Neither of the conductors will come through here again for some time to come, and I have permitted the porter to inhale enough chloroform so that he is sleeping soundly. In a word, you are at my mercy."

"So it would appear," replied Nick, who was now permitted to speak.

"Do you know why I am here, and why I threaten you, Nick Carter?"

"No; that is a detail which you have forgotten to explain."

"Or why I will not hesitate to drive this dagger through your heart if you attempt to resist me?"

"No."

"Or why I have been selected for this business with you?"

"No."

"I am here because I have been well paid for coming, and will be better paid when I have succeeded in my mission."

"Oh, I have no doubt of that."

"And I was selected because it is known that I am as strong and powerful—even more so—as you are."

"Really! You surprise me."

"I am a man who works for a price."

"I should have guessed that much."

"I do not deny it. I have been offered fifty thousand francs—ten thousand dollars—if I give my employers proof that you are dead. You happen to be in their way."

"I happen often to be in the way of a good many people."

"I am prepared to make terms with you, Carter."

"Oh, are you?"

"Yes. Every man has his price. I have mine."

"You seem to have several of them. What is this particular one, if I may ask?"

"You observe, do you not, that I hold the dagger at your throat? That my other hand is prepared to choke you again? You observe that?"

"Quite plainly."

"I could kill you very easily; with a pressure—so!—only a trifle harder;" and he jabbed the point of his weapon through Nick's skin. "Then—pouf!—your light goes out like a candle that is what you call snuffed; no? And in the meantime I hold you thus with my other hand so that you will not cry out when the dagger enters your heart, and so that the blood will not muss things; no? You comprehend, monsieur?"

"Perfectly."

"After that I pull the curtains together and leave you. There is nobody to offer to disturb you until after seven o'clock in the morning—and by that time I will have left the train, changed my disguise, and disappeared. Pouf! So! You comprehend, monsieur?"

"Yes."

"You observe how easily it is done?"

"Yes."

"And you have not forgotten what I said about the fifty thousand francs? No?"

"No."

"But you remember, also, another thing that I said, monsieur. It is that I have a price. You have not forgotten it? No?"

CHAPTER IX.

STARING DEATH IN THE FACE.

"You might save time," said Nick coolly, "by explaining in a few words what you are driving at."

"You are right, monsieur. I will do so. You are called a rich man."

"That remark has been made about me," admitted Nick.

"Your life is valuable—to yourself; no?"

"Quite so."

"For the moment it belongs to me. I will dispose of it—that is, I will sell it—to you; you understand?"

"That is nice. For how much?"

"Ah! but there are conditions in addition to the mere price."

"Indeed! You are a bargainer."

"*Oui, monsieur.* You have said it. You have the comprehension. A bargainer."

"But the price and the conditions—what are they?"

"The price for which I will spare your life is five thousand of your dollars. I think you have the sum with you; if not, you will know how to obtain it."

"Yes. And the conditions?"

"Ah! You accept the price; no?"

"I seem to have no choice in the matter. What are the conditions?"

"First, you will give me your word—the word of Nick Carter; you see that I know what the word of Nick Carter means; otherwise I would not bargain with you in this way—you give me your word that when I draw back and we walk into the smoking-compartment together to finish this talk, you will not attempt to retaliate upon me, and you will do nothing to change in any way what has happened."

"That is one condition. What are the others?"

"Ah. There is only one other. It is that you hide yourself away somewhere, and that you make no sign whatever to anybody that you are alive, until two months have passed. After that I care not."

"You mean that you will have received your fifty thousand francs for killing me, and ——"

"Exactly, monsieur. You should be grateful to me."

"I am not sure but I am. Now suppose I should refuse everything?"

"Then in two minutes from now you will be dead, and I will help myself to the money you have."

"Why don't you do that anyhow?"

"Well, you will observe, monsieur, that there is always a risk when one stabs another. If I kill you I assume that risk. If I let you live, there is no risk."

"You are very farseeing."

"*Oui, monsieur.*"

"All right. I'll——"

The detective got no farther than that.

He had been watching all the time for the slightest evidence of relaxation of the vigilance of the Frenchman and he had kept the conversation going for that purpose. Moreover, he knew that the fellow would judge others by himself, and that he believed that Nick would consent to do exactly what he himself would have done under similar circumstances.

Now the instant came when Nick Carter acted.

Notwithstanding the proximity of the dagger; notwithstanding the fact that the Frenchman's hand was still at his throat, Nick took chances and made the move he had calculated upon.

His own hands shot upward with a sudden motion and came full into the face of the Frenchman. It is true that they were under the blanket, but the principal object in this move was with the blanket itself to force the dagger to one side or backward, if only ever so little.

At the same instant Nick's two feet plunged forward, and they struck the Frenchman just where he had intended they should—below the belt.

The effect was as if the man had been hit with a club.

He reeled backward with a groan. The dagger fell from his grasp; and the next instant the detective had leaped from the berth, and with one well-directed blow, had stretched the Frenchman senseless at his feet.

Nick took the time then to reach for his coat, from which he procured two pairs of handcuffs, with which he fastened his late antagonist.

After that he left him lying where he was until he had pulled on part of his clothing; and then he carried him to the empty smoking-compartment, dropped him upon one of the seats, lighted a cigar, and calmly waited for him to open his eyes.

He did so presently and stared around him for a moment, in a surprised sort of way; and then, recollection returning to him, he smiled deprecatingly upon the detective, and said:

"There has been a change in the market, monsieur; no?"

Nick could not suppress a smile himself at that. The fellow's imperturbable cheek was amazing.

"Yes," he replied. "What have you to say about it now?"

"I merely wish to congratulate you upon what has happened, monsieur."

"Is that all? I wonder if you still have a price concealed somewhere about you."

"I should have a price, monsieur. But now I fear that there are no purchasers."

"That might depend largely upon what you have to dispose of," said Nick dryly.

"Ah! you are thinking about cutting my throat, or sparing my life—or a price, monsieur?"

"Not at all; but I am in the market to purchase some information which you may have to sell."

"Excellent. I had not thought of that."

"I wonder," said Nick musingly, "if you could tell the truth if you made the effort."

"Oh, yes, monsieur. To be sure. It is not the truth that I deal in mostly; but I know how to make use of it when it is advantageous. What is it that monsieur desires?"

"Who was it who sent you to kill me?" asked Nick.

"Monsieur forgets. He has said nothing about the price as yet."

"The price is your freedom—and if you are quite frank and truthful, some money. You will have to be contented with that. If you do not answer my questions, I will call the conductor and give you in charge. You will be turned over to the police at the next stop."

"It was my employer who sent me here to kill you, monsieur."

"Baron Von Buhlmach."

"Ah! You know his true name and title, I see."

"Yes. Where is the baron now?"

"He left the Pennsylvania station at five o'clock, en route for the West."

"What part of the West?"

"For the same station to which your ticket reads, monsieur."

"How do you know how my ticket reads?"

"I have seen it. I myself placed it in the envelope which the messenger boy delivered to monsieur at the station."

"You did, eh? I expected that there was some chicanery about that. Where is Trevelyan, if that is the case?"

"Monsieur Trevelyan was sleeping when I left him," was the suave reply.

"Had he been injured in any way?"

"Not at all. There were no such instructions concerning him."

"How was it that you were told to kill me, and not to kill him?"

"I think he was probably forgotten at the moment. You were an afterthought, suggested by one of my colleagues."

"Ah! Latrobe, I suppose."

"Monsieur is wonderful. He has penetration, he——"

"Answer my questions. Answer my questions."

"Oui, monsieur."

"Where did you leave Trevelyan, and what were the conditions in which you left him?"

"At a house in Bangor Street. The number is 45. He was tied in the shape of the letter X to a bed. He will be detained there until orders are received from the baron respecting him."

"Is that the truth?"

"That is the truth."

"And he has not been injured in any way?"

"Not seriously. He has an ugly bump on his head. Otherwise is all right."

"Where is Latrobe?"

"He is on this train with us, monsieur."

"In one of the other cars?"

"Yes."

"He did not dare to undertake this work that was assigned to you, did he?"

"No. He feared that monsieur would recognize him."

"As I should have done. I remember you now, too. You are Lefevre."

"At monsieur's service;" the Frenchman bowed.

"What a cold-blooded scoundrel you are, Lefevre!"

"Monsieur compliments me."

"Where are the others of your party?"

"All the Germans are together. Duclos is with them. Latrobe and I are on this train."

"What is your plan, in the West?"

"That I do not know."

"It is to abduct the princess, isn't it?"

"That has been the plan from the start."

"And to murder the child?"

"That has also been the plan from the start."

"And Mr. Maxwell Maxim—what of his fate?"

"He is not to be permitted to live. Beyond that, I do not know. It is my opinion, if monsieur wishes to hear it, that the old baron has some pet scheme of his own concerning the disposition of the young millionaire. I might guess at what it is, but I could not say positively."

"Let us hear you make a few guesses, then."

"I think, for instance, that the baron also desires to rid himself of an encumbrance; a gentleman to whom he has made promises which he has no desire to fulfil."

"Von Uhler?"

"*Oui, monsieur.*"

"Go on guessing."

"I think that the baron has a plan whereby Colonel Von Uhler will be angered into slaying the young millionaire; that after it is done, Von Uhler will be apprehended for the crime and will suffer for it. The baron, if he were not so big, would have made an excellent captain of cutthroats—professionals, I mean."

"You seem to have an excellent opinion of him, at least."

"I am not a stickler for morals, monsieur, as you may

have observed, but I am a saint when compared with the incomparable baron. Truly."

Nick laughed.

"How did you discover where to look for your victims?" he asked.

"Ah; such is our business. Latrobe's, Duclos', and mine. We have been everything from detectives to——"

"Yes; I know. Now, where were you to meet the baron again—after you had killed me?"

"He is to await us at Denver—at the Hotel Windsor."

"And what are your plans after that?"

"Ah, sir, I have told you that I do not know. The baron is one who does not tell of his plans too far ahead."

CHAPTER X.

A HOLD-UP AT THE STATION.

The detective leaned back in one corner of the seat in the smoking-compartment, lighted a cigar, and reflected; and at last, when he decided what to say to this unprincipled scoundrel who sat facing him, he did so very deliberately—and quite impressively.

"Lefevre," he said, "I wish you to listen very attentively to me now; and without interruption."

"*Oui, monsieur.* I am all attention. If monsieur, however, would be so kind as to remove the shackles from me before he begins, it would be more conducive to my understanding."

"I have no doubt of it," said Nick, laughing; and first assuring himself that the Frenchman had no weapons with which to make a sudden attack upon him, Nick took off the irons and directed Lefevre to sit in the far corner of the compartment and to pay close attention to what he had to say.

"There is one commodity in which I never deal, even with such as you," he said. "That is the commodity called treachery. I have no doubt that I could purchase your treachery with a moderate price, and that you would serve me just as long as it pleased you, or paid you to do so; but I believe that I can make a better use of you in another way."

The Frenchman bowed, but made no response.

"I am going to keep my word with you and set you at liberty. You are at liberty to leave this train at any station you choose—you and Latrobe."

Lefevre bridged in another elaborate bow.

"You have been offered a price for my death and you may return, or not, as you please, to your employer, and report what you please concerning me. That is no concern of mine. I am satisfied that you have told me as much of the truth concerning your employer as you know; but as I shall insist upon your leaving this train, I shall arrive in Denver before you do.

"Of course, it will be your opportunity to telegraph to the baron—if you elect to do so—all the particulars of this meeting of ours; but I don't think you will do that. It will be more in keeping with your character that you should send him a message which will lead him to suppose that you have been successful in your undertaking."

Again that elaborate bow and a faint smile from the Frenchman.

"Also, you may make whatever statement you please to your copatriot, Latrobe; but you may add to it a message from me. Say to him that I shall not act until I have arrived in Buffalo; but that then I shall set all the machinery of the police of this country in motion, and that if he is found anywhere within the limits of the United States after that, I will see to it that he will get just as long a term in one of our State prisons as the law will allow. He will know what it is for. Canada is very near to Buffalo, and he can return to Europe via Canada without much trouble; and as for you, Lefevre——"

"*Oui, monsieur.*"

"I would advise you to find an excuse to get out of the country even quicker than your friend Latrobe. We will let it go at that. You are wise in your generation."

"*Oui, monsieur.*"

"That is all. If you will take a word more of advice you will now get your traps together and prepare to leave the train when we get to Buffalo. I don't suppose you have much baggage with you."

"No; one small hand-bag; that is all; and Latrobe the same."

"Then I think our interview is closed."

Without another word he handed the other a large bill, left the smoking-compartment, and returned to his berth; and because he knew that Lefevre would believe that he was watching, he closed his eyes and slept quite undisturbed until daylight awakened him, for he had raised the curtains of his windows.

At Buffalo the next morning he saw Lefevre and Latrobe leave the train together; and they walked rapidly away without turning their heads. If the detective could have heard all that they were saying at the time, he would have smiled.

Before Buffalo was reached, Nick had written out a long telegram to the chief of the detective bureau at police headquarters, in which he described all that had happened to Trevelyan. He gave the address where Trevelyan could be found and rescued, and added the information that he would await him in Denver.

This message he sent back from Buffalo, and then continued on his way westward.

The detective was sure that not one of the baron's party knew him by sight, when he was entirely without disguise, and so had resorted to none whatever.

Duclos and the two German secret service men did not know him; and the baron, his valet, and Ethel von Ulder were also ignorant of his real personal appearance, so

with Lefevre and Latrobe out of the way he had no fear of being recognized.

His first care on arriving in Denver was to go at once to the chief of police, make himself known, and ask a favor.

"I wish you to go with me to the main offices of the two telegraph companies," he said. "I wish to know if any telegrams have been received here during the last few days by Count Epstein, and if so, what the messages contained."

They found several—some of no importance at all, three that were.

The first was dated from New York, and said:

"We have arrived with Trevelyan. He has decided to remain in New York indefinitely. Health is poor. May not survive."

The second one was dated at Buffalo, and read:

"Have persuaded Nichols"—meaning Nick Carter, of course—"to remain over here for indefinite time. If you telegraph the money, he will take the journey you requested."

The third one was:

"Telegraphic order received. Nichols has departed, as desired."

The messages were all signed by Lefevre, and the last one had been delivered in Denver the very morning of the day of Nick's arrival there.

It was significant, too; for it told as plainly as words could have done, that the baron had wired the blood-money to his two cutthroats for the murder of Nick Carter, and that consequently the old baron no doubt believed that he was rid of the two detectives for good and all.

But Nick also received a telegram for himself that evening. It was from Trevelyan, and it told the detective that the Scotland Yard man had been freed from his temporary imprisonment and would arrive in Denver the following evening—twenty-four hours after Nick's arrival.

With these preliminaries attended to, Nick sauntered around to the Windsor Hotel and took a seat in the big office room, where after a time he saw the baron and Von Uhler stroll arm in arm through the corridor.

Nick's impulse was to seek an opportunity for a few words alone with the colonel, in order to warn him of the plot that the baron had against him, for deep down in his heart Nick knew that Von Uhler was no villain; but on second thought he decided to let matters take their course.

The baron seemed in no hurry to continue his journey; he appeared to be waiting for something, and Nick was secretly glad of this, for it afforded an opportunity for Trevelyan to make up the lost time.

Events worked out exactly as the detective could have wished them to do, for at the very hour when Nick was to go to the Union Station to meet Trevelyan, the German party was driven to it in order to take a train for the West; and so it happened that Trevelyan merely stepped from one train to another.

Belmar, in Nevada, was formerly a mining-town of considerable prominence, but now the mines have been worked out and the town almost deserted; and that happened before the railroad had been pushed through to the mining-town.

When the party left the train at the station from which it was necessary to go by stage to Belmar, Nick was somewhat surprised to find that the baron was evidently expected, and that an escort was awaiting him and his party.

Nick and Trevelyan had arrayed themselves as prospectors, and when they left the train there was nothing whatever about their appearance to excite the suspicions of any member of the baron's party—and with the exception of that party, they were the only passengers who left the train at that station.

It will be remembered that all told there were still six men in the baron's outfit. They were the baron, Von Uhler, the valet, Duclos, and the two German secret service men. In the party that came to meet the baron there were also six men—big, swarthy, evil-looking men they were, too, who would have passed muster for ideal road-agents in earlier days.

In the outfit there was one buckboard, drawn by a pair of half-tamed horses; and there were saddle-horses for the remainder of the outfit—and Nick understood now for what the baron had been waiting in Denver.

In some manner the old fellow had made arrangements for this band of outlaws to meet him at this station, and he had merely awaited instructions that they were ready.

When the train pulled away from the station, leaving the two parties—one consisting of twelve men and the other of only two—standing on the station, which, by the way, was the only building in sight, Nick purposely turned his back toward the other party, and then strolled to the other end of the station, where the so-called stage was waiting.

It was a two-seated buckboard, drawn by a pair of bony ponies, with a driver who was quite as bony—but the detective had not approached him near enough to make any remark, when he heard somebody moving rapidly toward him, and a gruff voice called to him:

"Hey, partner! a word with you."

Nick's hands were in his coat pockets, and he wheeled without removing them; but when he turned, he discovered that the man who had spoken to him—a big, burly fellow, who was evidently the leader of the other party,—

already had him covered with the muzzle of a big .45 Colt, and was smiling across it into Nick's eyes.

It wasn't a pleasant smile, either.

"Stranger," said the man meaningly, "three of my friends have got you and your friend covered, same as I have. Jest take your flippers out of your pockets—empty—if you please. We jest want your pedigree; that's all."

"How does my pedigree concern you, stranger?" asked Nick, smiling; and at the same time complying with the request.

"That, partner, don't happen to be any of your dog-gone business jest at present. All I want to know is where are you from and where are you going? Answer them questions and there won't be no trouble, I reckon."

"Well," said Nick, "if that interests you, you're welcome. My friend and I are late from Denver, where we were gold-mining for a trip through the old mining camps south of here; and as to where we are bound—I was jest a-goin' to ask this here stage-driver that same question. Is that satisfactory?"

"I reckon so. No offense, stranger—this time."

"You seem to be mighty particular about folks when they blow in here," said Nick, with a laugh. "I didn't know that you needed a password to cross the border into Nevada nowadays. It wasn't necessary when I was here before."

The man shrugged his shoulders, and, dropping his gun into their holsters, he turned to the stage-driver.

"Bully Madden," he said coldly, "you know me?"

"Yep," was the instant reply.

"I've a-holdin' for a promise from you, Bully."

"What is it, Pete? What do yuh want o' me?"

"I want you to delay your departure from this here spot just two hours. Think you can do it, Bully?"

"Leather life! Nothing easier. My harness is out uh kilter, anyway."

"All right, Bully. You know *me*?"

"Leather life, Pete! Two hours, eh?"

"Just that, Bully. So long!"

CHAPTER XI.

BLACK PETE AND HIS GANG.

"I suppose," said the detective to the stage-driver, after they had stood in silence together watching the departure of the baron's party, led by the burly ruffian in the black beard, until they were half-hidden in a cloud of dust half a mile away, "that we are good now for a two hours' wait right here; is that so, Bully Madden?"

"That's about the size of it, stranger, if anybody should venture to inquire," was the reply.

"Who is Bully Madden, anyhow?" asked Nick, after another pause, and smiling rather derisively.

"That's me, stranger."

"How'd you ever get such a handle as that tacked onto yeh?"

"They used to think I was something of a scrapper around these parts. That's how."

"Oh, they did, eh? Did you ever look into the business-end of one of these things during the time you was called a scrapper?" And as Nick spoke he quietly drew his own gun and leveled it straight for the stage-driver's heart.

"I have," was the calm reply.

"Then I don't suppose you'd have any rooted objections to starting away right now if I should ask you to do it; eh?" smiled Nick.

"Nope. But all the same, I wouldn't advise it, stranger."

"No? Why not?"

"You don't know that feller who asked me to wait, do you?"

"No. Who is he?"

"Black Pete Gay. He's got a ranch over in the Smoky. He's the bad man of these parts. It ain't like it used to be around here; but all the same, Black Pete don't allow no difference, and he'd jest as soon lay out a feller now as he would have done ten years ago—or twenty, or thirty."

Nick put away his gun.

"Do you know anybody around here named Maxim?" he asked.

"Yep. The ranch-house is fifty miles from here."

"Anywhere near Black Pete's place?"

"Matter of twenty miles, maybe."

"Anywhere near where you drive that stage to?"

"Nope. About the same distance from there as from here."

"All right," said Nick. "Now, let me tell you something."

"Fire away, stranger."

"If you had any use for the same kind that you had when you was called Bully, and if you weren't as afraid as

all get out of Black Pete—I'd offer you a cold hundred dollars in cash to drive my friend and me to Maxim's ranch right away—start now; but——"

"Say, stranger, hold on a minute. Do you happen to mean that?"

For answer, Nick took a roll of bills from his pocket and displayed it. Then he said:

"If you had any sand you might take fifty of it now and the other fifty when you delivered the goods; that is, when you put us down at Maxim's ranch."

The stage-driver reached out his hand.

"I'll take it," he said.

"What about the sand?" asked Nick.

"I've got that, too."

"How about that harness that is out of kilter?"

"That is all fixed. I've been fixin' it for the last five minutes."

"All right; here is your fifty. How soon do you think you can make the ranch?"

"Well, if it wasn't for that baggage of yours, which looks heavy——"

"We will leave the baggage behind. Those bundles contain nothing but a few bricks and chunks of wood. Now what?"

"I can get you there an hour after dark to-night."

"That will be about eight hours," said Nick thoughtfully. "For every hour you succeed in taking off of that time, I will add ten dollars to the amount. Now start!"

Five minutes later they were riding at a gallop across the country, in a direction that pointed at an acute angle from the one taken by the other party.

"If Black Pete ever hears of this——" muttered the driver, when they started; but Nick interrupted him.

"You'll have to get the drop on him first, that's all," he said; and the driver nodded.

We will not describe that journey. Fortunately the road was almost over level stretches of ground for the greater part of the way, and the tough ponies seemed to be tireless; and the sun was just dipping behind the mountains toward the west when the buckboard came to a stop among the cluster of buildings of Maxim's ranch, which was locally known as "Star-angle."

Just before they drove up to the ranch, Billy Madden said to Nick:

"Stranger, I have been doin' some thinkin' while we've been movin' along this trail, and I've got something to say."

"All right; say it," replied the detective.

"That baggage business of your'n and a few other things tells me that you're out here after Black Pete's scalp. I reckon that's so, ain't it?"

"You can call it that for the sake of argument."

"Well, there ain't no sort uh use in my trying to drive that stage any more so long's Pete is on top of the earth, and so if you'll accept my services for a few days, I'll jest enlist along with you and take my chances about gettin' a bead on him when it comes to a show-down. I'd feel that much surer for the future if I knowed he'd swallowed one uh my own pills, than I would if somebody should tell me about it. Is that agreeable?"

"I guess so. What about your stage?"

"Oh, the stage-route can go to thunder until this business is settled. I don't ask no pay more'n you're going to give me—and, besides, I reckon I can be of some help. I know all about Black Pete and his gang."

"How many men has he got?"

"About twenty-five, all told."

"Are they all like that outfit we saw?"

"Jest about."

"How many cowboys has Maxim got here on this ranch?"

"Well, when they are all together here there are twenty or thirty of them; but jest now they're pretty well scattered around the country, and I don't suppose there is as many as five right here—if there is that many."

"All right, Madden. You shall be one of us; and you will be paid for your services, too."

"And now, sir," said Madden, "if you could tell me something about what the game is, it might be that I could suggest something. I ain't asking no questions on account of curiosity, stranger, for that is a thing we don't fool much with around here, but all the same, as I said before, I know Pete and his bunch, and it's likely that I could make a good guess about what they're going to do if I knowed——"

"That's all right, Madden. Young Maxim is here with his wife and baby, isn't he?"

"Yep."

"Well, that old duffer you saw with Black Pete is here to steal Maxim's wife, murder the baby, and put Maxim out of the way, too, if that is possible. I'm here to prevent it; I and my partner, here. That's the game."

"I see. May I ask who you be, if it's no offense?"

"My name is Nick Carter. I am——"

"What! Nick Carter? Are you the chap what took little Chick from these very parts long about—let me see—fifteen years ago; hey?"

"Yes."

"Shake, stranger. I've heard about you and Chick. I'll tie to you, all right, and you'll find that Bully Madden ain't no slouch, if you did think he didn't have much sand. Now, I'll tell you something about what I think Black Pete will be up to—maybe this very night, for all we know."

"Well?"

"He's a matter of twenty miles from here; perhaps not so far. He's got at least twenty-five men—maybe more: there may be thirty or forty in the outfit. They are all desperadoes, and I reckon there ain't one in the bunch that ain't wanted for something—from rustling cattle to cutting throats."

"Go on."

"Pete knows there ain't no men here to protect the place, and he'll dress his men out like a lot uh Indians—that's his favorite game—and he'll drop down onto this place like a thousand uh brick. He'll murder everybody in sight—if he has to; and he'll burn the hull bizness down to the ground, if he has to. That is about what we're up against."

"And you think he may make the attempt to-night?"

"He ain't one to wait when he has got a job of that sort on hand. You see, his way is to fix up an alibi first. He should come to-night—or whenever he does come—he and all the rest of them would be disguised so's you wouldn't know one. Then somewhere else there would be a lot of witnesses that would swear that he and any uh his men who happened to be spotted were somewheres else—see?"

"Yes."

"That's his game. It has always worked so far. People around here knows that he does the things that are charged against him, but they can't never prove it—and there you are."

"Yes," said Nick. "And here *we* are, at the ranch. And there, too, is Maxwell Maxim."

He leaped to the ground and ran toward the young millionaire, holding out his hand, which was grasped with a fervency of welcome that ought to have been satisfying to anybody.

"Nick," exclaimed young Maxim, "I sure am glad to see you! What! Trevelyan, too? Well, this is a pleasure. What in the world brings you way out here?"

"Business," replied Nick laconically. "Come off here to one side while I tell you about it;" and then he told Trevelyan's story and his own, from the time when Trevelyan decided to go to Germany to keep watch over the baron, until the present moment.

"Now," said the detective, in conclusion, "we are as hungry as bears."

"Of course. I hadn't thought of that. Come along and I'll fill you up; and Wanda will be as glad to see you and Trevelyan as I am."

"And how is the boy?" asked Nick, as they entered the house, having turned Madden over to others to entertain and feed.

"Fine, Nick, fine! So we've got a scrap on our hands to-night, or to-morrow, eh? With all due respect to your driver, I don't think that any attack will be made here before daylight, and then it will be attempted by strategy. Black Pete has been over here two or three times lately, and he was here again to-day, early in the morning. Rode this way on his trip to the station to meet the baron, probably. He did more than that, too."

"What was it?"

"He said he was expecting some visitors from the East, and asked if he could bring them over here to show them what a first-class ranch is like. That's his game. He'll appear here soon after daylight in the morning, with half a dozen of his men—and he'll have a score more of his followers hidden out yonder in the sage-brush, waiting for a signal."

"How many men have you got here beside yourself?" asked Nick.

"Five only: so you see we are only nine altogether."

"You couldn't get any more of your men in by sending after them to-night, could you?"

"No. They are too far away, and too greatly scattered. That is no use at all."

"Then we will have to stand them off with what we've got," said Nick.

"Yes."

"How many women are here, all told?"

"Three besides my wife."

"Then we must fix up a safe place for them somewhere, and——"

"And fight the whole outlaw bunch with our nine, Nick. We'll do it."

CHAPTER XII.

THE UNDOING OF THE BARON.

A council of war was called that evening in the ranch-house, and the men were informed about what they were up against. It is to the credit of all of them, too, that they rather looked forward to the affair with pleasure; not one of them expressed any doubt regarding their ability to stand off the outlaws.

By common consent, Nick Carter took command of the little garrison, and he gave each one of the defenders his separate instructions; then two were told off to keep watch through the night, and the rest retired to get what sleep they could.

"It ain't like Black Pete to do anything of this sort in the daytime," said Madden, when they were parting for the night, "and there ain't but just one explanation for it if he waits till daytime. That is, that he is to be paid so much that he can light out of this country altogether for good and all after it is over."

However, the night passed without incident, and morning dawned beautifully bright and clear.

The time was approaching eight o'clock when Bully Madden reported that Black Pete and a troop of horsemen were approaching the ranch.

"There's twelve in the bunch," he said to Nick, "and they'll be here in ten minutes."

"All right," replied the detective. "You keep out of sight for the present, Bully."

Nick stepped outside the house for a moment and used a pair of binoculars upon the approaching party of horsemen; and then, with a smile, he turned to Max, who was at his side.

"The party consists of the baron, Colonel Von Uhler, Black Pete, and nine of his followers," he said quietly. "I don't understand this game at all, Max. This is a bold move on the part of the baron, to come here openly like that. I don't like it. Will you obey my orders, Max?"

"Yes."

"Then I want you to stay inside of the house for the present, out of sight. And remain out of sight, too, until you hear me call your name. Get in, now, and obey. You, too, Trevelyan. Let me run the thing at least, for the present."

Then, as the party rode into the enclosure in front of the house, Nick stepped out alone to meet them.

There was one peculiar part of the defending party in sight when Black Pete with his men and his two guests drew rein in front of the wide veranda; and Black Pete started violently when he recognized in Nick, who stepped forward to meet them, the same man with whom he had talked at the station the preceding day.

"Hello!" he said gruffly; "*you're* here, are you?"

"Very much here, Black Pete," replied Nick smilingly. "I thought, seeing the company you were in yesterday, that it would be just as well if I got here before you did." Then, turning his eyes only, he swept with one glance the persons of the baron and Eitel von Uhler, and he added in the same even, smiling tones:

"Baron Von Buhlmach and Colonel Von Uhler, I believe. In what way can we be of service to you, gentlemen? Mr. Maxim was not expecting calls so early in the day and he has delegated me to represent him."

The baron muttered a curse in German; Von Uhler turned red, then pale, and was silent. The outlaw swore loudly, and replied for the others:

"I'll tell you what we want, damned quick!" he said. "We want——"

"Silence!" ordered the baron sternly. "Who are you?" he demanded, then, of Nick.

The detective smiled derisively into the baron's face, as he replied:

"I am the Nick Carter whom you delegated one Lefevre to murder, baron. Pete, if you or one of your men make a move to draw a weapon, you'll all be shot down where you are. Every one of you, from the baron down, is covered from the walls of the house. We were expecting this call and we are prepared for it. You might possibly kill me, but every one of you would be dead men before my body touched the ground."

He turned again to the baron, and continued:

"The princess, your niece, whom you came here to abduct, who is now Mrs. Maxwell Maxim, is here, but she will not see you. The child, whom you intended to murder, is also here. The husband of your niece holds a rifle that is aimed at your heart at this moment.

"And you, Colonel Eitel von Uhler—it is possible that you may already have recognized in me the Lord Angus Ainsdrow with whom you talked in New York. Lord Angus is a friend of mine whose identity I borrow on occasion. I borrowed it once in Germany, and as such I assisted Trevelyan to rescue the princess from the scoundrel of an uncle of hers."

The baron muttered another oath, and made a motion as if to reach for a weapon, but Nick said in a low, quiet:

"Baron, if you do not desire to sign your own death-warrant, you will hear me patiently to the end. At the first move on the part of any one of you twelve, *every one of you will drop from your saddles.* I advise you not to forget that."

Then he addressed Von Uhler again, who was sitting on his horse as if he had been turned to stone.

"Eitel von Uhler," he said, "this old reprobate of a baron has deceived you from the very first. That maid at Castle Craig, in Germany, was murdered by his order; she was dressed in the clothing of the princess by his order. The marriage of the princess to Maxim was legal in every way. When you supposed the princess to be ill at Thunder Castle, he was holding her a prisoner there, feeding her on bread and water and otherwise ill-treating her—*and he intended if his plots here succeeded to leave you here to pay to this country the penalty of his own crimes.*"

"You are lying!" said the baron calmly, moving nothing but his lips, which were now white.

"No, I am not," replied Nick. "You are the liar; you are the scoundrel; you are the robber, the blackguard, the thief of a woman's honor. If I had thought of it in time I would have prepared myself to place a hot branding-iron across that hard old face of yours; but as it is, you and your horde of ruffians, together with the others who are waiting in the sage-brush out yonder, can right about face and mosey back to Black Pete's ranch as quickly as you know how. You, Von Uhler, I advise to remain behind with us. I know that you are not a villain, although you are in bad company. I advise you to get off your horse and go inside the house, and there you will find Maxim ready to receive you, and the princess ready to forgive you and to be again your friend."

Von Uhler stared at the detective with amazed eyes for a moment; and then, with sudden decision, he slipped from his horse to the ground and with his shoulders well back and without once turning his head, he stalked across the dooryard to the house and entered it.

"Good!" said Nick. "Now, *you*, Black Pete."

"What about me?" demanded Black Pete, grinning ironically at the detective.

"You and your gang can have twenty-four hours to get out of this country. You can sell off your stock in San Francisco for what you can get for it; but after twenty-four hours this won't be a healthy locality for you, and the like of you."

"What if I tell you to go to——"

"I'll have you hung for a horse-thief and a cattle-rustler inside of ten hours after the twenty-four have passed, if you don't skiddoo. That's all."

"You will, will you, you da——"

He reached for his gun and drew it so quickly that he had brought it down and fired before Nick realized that he was in danger; but even as the bullet from it whizzed past Nick Carter's ear, a second report came from one of the windows of the house, and Black Pete, without a sigh or a sound, pitched out of his saddle to the ground, and he was dead before he struck it; and then Nick heard Bull Madden's voice shout:

"I reckon, Mr. Carter, that I'll keep on driving that stage for a while yet—if I ain't got any sand."

As if with one accord the nine outlaws who had come there with Black Pete wheeled their horses and rode away toward the sage-brush, leaving the baron alone and unprotected.

"Yonder lies your way, baron," said the detective coldly, pointing with his finger along the trail toward the station. "At the end of that trail is the railroad, and beyond it somewhere is Germany and Castle Thunder, your home. I advise you, during the few remaining years of your wicked life, never to show your hard old face in this Western country again. Go!"

The baron stared in silence at his tormentor for a moment. Then slowly he turned his horse about, and with his head bowed over his saddle-horn, with his chin almost resting upon his breast, he rode slowly away from them, and not one of the people at Maxim's ranch ever saw him again. It was known only that he lived to return to his home in Germany.

"Two shots only were fired, and one life only has been lost," said Nick to Maxim, as the latter came out of the house to join him. "Bully Madden probably saved my life. Where is he, Max?"

"Gone. He went out at the back of the house to the corral to get his horses as soon as he had killed Pete. He asked me to tell you not to blame him, but he sure did think that Pete would kill you."

"I know," said Nick. "I understand."

Just then Eitel von Uhler came out of the house with Trevelyan.

"Mr. Carter," he said, "Trevelyan has told me everything. How can I ever thank you——"

"There; that will do for that!" said Nick, smiling. "When I have seen you make your peace with the princess; when your eyes are glad as you look upon her happiness, I will be thanked sufficiently for all time."

"I have already made my peace with Wanda," replied Von Uhler; "and it is my heart that is glad indeed for her happiness—and for this gentleman's—her husband. What can I do, Mr. Maxim, to atone for the horrible thoughts——"

"Forget it! Stay with us here for a month and breathe this air!" laughed Maxim. "Glory, hallelujah, Nick! but you are a general worth fighting under."

Then they entered the house and joined Wanda, and as Nick Carter bowed over her hand she put her white arms around his neck impulsively, and kissed him.

"You have been our savior twice," she said. "God bless you!"

A few months later, in New York, old Porter Maxim said to Nick Carter:

"I made a fool of myself, after all, Nick, in trying to break that old baron."

"You did? Why?" asked the detective.

"Oh, I made it cost him about a million of his fortune, and this morning my branch house in Berlin informs me that the old duffer is dead, and that he has left everything he had to Wanda. What do you think of that?"

"I think," replied Nick, "that she can spare the million you made her uncle lose, and that he has done the best he could in the way of asking forgiveness for all that he did."

THE END.

The next number, 525, of this weekly will be "The Passenger on the Night Local; or, Nick Carter's Perfect Disguise."

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